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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Perceptions of Choice in the Occupational Selection Process of Mature Women

by

Barbara A. Downes

C

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

DEPARTMENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 1993

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Barbara Downes

Permanent Address:

1004, 10040 - 116 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1V7

October 7, 1993
Date

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a dissertation entitled *Perceptions of Choice in the Occupational Selection Process of Mature Women* submitted by Barbara A. Downes in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

H.J. Kass, Co-supervisor

A.G. Konrad, Co-supervisor

K.G. Jacknicke, Chair and Examining Committee

P.A. Brook, Supervisory Committee

O.S.E. Bilash, Examining Committee

B.L. Shapiro, External Examiner

Sept. 30, 1993
Date

ABSTRACT

This descriptive study explored the perceptions of choice in the occupational selection process of mature women. Data were obtained from indepth interviews with eight purposively selected women: four in office training programs and four in office occupations.

Three research questions guided the study: What is the nature of the career aspirations of mature women? How or to what extent are socialization patterns perceived to have influenced present life situations? How do women's job seeking strategies influence their position in the labour market?

The data analysis was based on the four-stage method of constant comparative analysis. Five themes that emerged from the data are discussed from the perspective of the "self" using personal construct theory. "Self" was interpreted through relationships established by each woman with the expert other, cultural controls, institutions, denial/fulfillment, and dependence.

The women in this study reflect feminist concerns regarding career development. Their range of career choice was a limited menu of stereotypical alternatives presented to them by authority figures. External factors such as institutional policies, screening devices, entrance tests, availability of space, funding restrictions, time, and cost of courses limited choices. These women preferred to work outside the home but were still largely responsible for all household tasks; consequently, they felt stressed or frustrated on an ongoing basis. The first choice of occupation or program was not available to seven women because of financial constraints or quota enrollments.

These women expected to be dependent; however, a critical incident caused each woman to re-evaluate her current situation and re-define her role. Illness,

death, divorce, and/or poverty forced these women to make decisions that had lifetime implications. Their choices at these critical times reflected what they saw as the best or only alternative available to them. Only one worker felt she had promotional opportunities and expressed satisfaction with her job.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> The employment of women in commercial and clerical occupations especially requires regulation in accordance with the principle of "equal pay for equal work." (Webb, 1919, p. 75)
>
> In 1985, women employed for the full year received an average of 59.6% of men's wages (Labour Canada, 1987). In 1989, that figure had dropped to 59%. (Statistics Canada, 1989)

This study explored the perceptions of choice in the occupational selection process of mature women.

The increased participation of women in the paid labour force is one of the most significant changes in the labour market in the past 15 years. Yet, despite women's increased involvement in the labour force, they are still segregated in clerical, sales, and service occupations which are not only the lowest paying jobs, but also those with limited opportunities for promotion (Abella, 1984). Technological innovations that dramatically changed the structure of the workforce have serious implications for training and/or educational programs designed for competency in office occupations. A number of questions must be addressed: What kinds of education and training will best prepare future workers? How much education will workers need to succeed in a technological environment? What kinds and how many jobs will be created by new technologies? What kinds and how many jobs will become lost through obsolescence?

Higher costs of living, and increasing numbers of contract, temporary, and part-time positions are faced by today's clerical workers. And yet, women who wish to re-enter the workforce account for 90% of the participants in retraining

programs for low paying, office occupations (Women's Bureau, 1989). Why do women, particularly mature women, enter or re-enter the workforce in this capacity?

Increased Participation of Women

The area showing the largest growth in overall labour participation is in clerical occupations which have risen from 4% of total labour force in 1911 to 27.6% in May, 1993. In May, 1993, 79.8% of workers in this occupational cluster were women. Trend data predict this concentration will continue (Statistics Canada, June, 1993).

Presently, much of the research on women at work focuses on a range of issues that women face; emphasis is placed on problem areas such as attaining equity, eliminating sexual harassment, and resolving role conflicts. Most notably research focuses on the well-being of women workers rather than on the role of women in the organization's productivity (Gutek, Larwood, & Stromberg, 1986).

Pay and Employment Equity

In spite of legislation first enacted in 1951 which made it unlawful in Canada to pay women less than men for the same work in the same establishment, women consistently receive lower salaries. The debate on equal pay centres on two issues: equal pay for equal work, and equal pay for work of substantially similar value. The courts have interpreted the legislation as "allowing comparison of similar job function as well as actual job description" (Abella, 1984, p. 236). There is no requirement in law that jobs must be strictly equal to justify equal pay. As long as jobs are similar in content and performed under similar working conditions, they can be compared to determine if the wages for one are

arbitrarily lower or higher than for another. For women, it is essential that equal pay be considered through employment equity or the equal value concept as there are many jobs that are traditionally female and will probably so continue.

"Despite the existence of these equal pay laws, many women still earn 10 to 20% less than men even where they are employed in the same occupation and within the same firm" (Abella, 1984, p. 236). Although the majority of office occupations are considered "women's work," men in these occupations continue to earn more than women (Labour Canada, 1987). For instance, Statistics Canada (1985) reported that an electronic data processing equipment operator (job classification 4143) in the Canadian Federal government earned an average salary of $21,695. The average salary for males in this field was $28,954, and for females $19,809; females earned 68.4% less than their male counterparts.

In today's society, increasing unemployment, falling wages, inflation, and lack of job security make it difficult to survive without more than one wage earner in a family. Most women, like most men, work because they require the income. However, some economists and politicians have argued that women, particularly married women, do not need to work and thus their employment may be regarded "as a matter of choice which has little consequence in terms of economic hardship" (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1981, p. 7). The assumption that women do not need to work has led to the classification of women as secondary workers. Although Armstrong and Armstrong (1981) stated that the meaning of this classification is unclear, the distinction frequently implies that women are secondary workers because they move in and out of the labour force, often work part-time, and usually earn less than men. It also implies that these patterns reflect the choices of women.

Furthermore, Scanzoni (1978) maintained that until recently it was rare to investigate the achievements of women: "Social scientists did not take women's employment seriously. It was thought of merely as an option, not a right, and simply did not generate much attention" (p. 29). In spite of legislation passed in 1951 and enforced (in Alberta) by the *Human Rights Protections Act* (1980), discrepancies such as these suggest that more than legislation is needed to address the issue of pay and employment equity.

Gender Segregation

One of the strongest and most consistent findings is that work is segregated by gender. Sex role socialization has led to a concentration of men and women in various jobs that were considered appropriate for their sex. Previously, social scientists studying the process of sex role socialization argued that sex roles were biologically based and that each sex had appropriate behaviours. Reinforcing the differences between males and females was important for the social functioning of society. Men were socialized to obtain satisfaction from competitive performance while women were socialized to respond to affectional relationships. The role of homemaker was regarded as the primary role for women; consequently, the normal expectation was that women would work outside the home only until marriage.

Middle-aged women of today are influenced by these socialization patterns of the post-war era. They grew up during the 1940s and 1950s when the increase in married women's labour force participation was just beginning. Commonly, this generation did not plan for a full working life or even for the return to work after their children were grown (Shaw, 1983).

The overall degree of gender segregation has been a remarkably stable phenomenon since the turn of this century. This segregation has deep social and cultural roots (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Occupations which are predominately held by women have pay differential and a reduced potential for promotion as common characteristics (Gutek, Larwood, & Stromberg, 1986).

Career development theories do not adequately or convincingly address either the increased involvement of women in the workforce (particularly those in clerical occupations) or the factors which influence the available choices for mature women (Astin, 1984; Brooks, 1984, 1990; Collin & Young, 1986; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; Osipow, 1983; Scanzoni, 1978). The early theories relating to career development focus primarily on white, middle-class males, and later theories which include women concentrate on those in professions which are often female dominated, for example, teaching and nursing.

The literature indicates that studies of office occupations are mainly concerned with the impact of technology on productivity, or it seeks to explain or describe inequalities and gender bias in office occupations (Bradley, 1989; Braverman, 1974; Lowe, 1980; Middleton, 1985). Not only is there a paucity of information on why women choose to enter office occupations, but there is even less on the factors that influence the occupational choices of mature women in these areas.

Webb's (1919, p. 11) recommendation "that the employment of women in commercial and clerical occupations especially requires regulation in accordance with the principle of equal pay for equal work," might well have been written

today. Women still confront major inequalities and "gender remains a key determinate of inequality in our society" (Krahn & Lowe, 1988, p. 123).

The Changing Structure of the Workplace

Concurrently and equally significant as the increased participation of women is the changing structure of the workplace. This is caused largely by technological innovations and it has significantly altered the training and/or educational requirements of the workers.

Polarization of the Workplace

Technological change, particularly informatics and micro-electronics, plays an important role in the polarization of the workplace. The office worker is particularly vulnerable to this change as clerical work moves from a traditional, hierarchial organization towards arrangements that are more like networks (Ammon & Robertson, 1985). As new information systems make data access more readily available to more people, communication lines take a new form. The hierarchy flattens and communication forms an integrated network. Computers and other automated technology permit executives to bypass middle managers. This causes traditional distinctions to blur and feedback from the marketplace flows more readily to all levels (Harris, 1985).

Changing Educational Requirements

Change in organizational structure is directly related to a number of changes in clerical work and the skill requirements of workers. Although controversy exists as to the degree of these changes, there is little argument that educational requirements are changing (Harris, 1985).

Changing roles. Formerly, relatively few managers were employed and their main function was to perform mental work, and a large number of clerical workers were employed to perform manual tasks such as typing, operating the switchboard, filing and duplicating (Rumberger, 1987). In today's modern office many executives input data, telephone calls bypass switchboards, electronic filing is automatic, electronic mail and electronic message boards reduce the need for duplicating, and facsimile machines have eliminated much of the work previously assigned to mail clerks.

New technologies demand an ability to perform abstract rather than concrete tasks. Computer processes are linked in complex networks rather than simple sequences. Thus the requirements to think abstractly and symbolically and to understand the underlying structure of interrelated production systems are more important requirements than specific skills which may become quickly obsolete (Grubb, 1987).

Training opportunities. Vendors are a major source of training for technology. As the office becomes technologically more advanced, the training that equipment operators require is more specific. Increasingly, training is becoming a part of the sales-promotion/marketing strategy of various manufacturers. Consequently, there is an increase in employer-based training in both the public and private sectors. For example, Xerox spent approximately $125 million a year to train or retrain 40% of its 120,000 employees (Smith, 1983).

Abella (1984) reported that in similar jobs, women did not always have equal access to on-the-job training programs and to other training opportunities provided by employers. Previously, this discrepancy was attributed to women's

lack of commitment to the workplace even though women's turnover rates were equal to men's.

Implications. Jackson (1987) stated that a new threat arising from changes that have taken place in the vocational/technical sector pose new problems for women:

> The new threat lies . . . with the quality and character of training programs being offered, and arises from the growing interest of policy makers in courses that service the short-term needs of employers. The design of instruction driven by this concern leads to problems within the learning environment itself. The conceptualization and organization of such instruction lead potentially . . . to impoverishment of the substance of vocational knowledge itself and to the separation of skills from the power and status of workers. . . . They should be of particular concern to feminists who see education and training as an important avenue for improving the economic status of women. (p. 351)

Personnel departments and training programs focus on skills as a quantifiable or technical qualification (How fast can you type?), but most office work also includes abstract thinking, decision-making, and a great deal of communication and interaction. These less technical aspects are often overlooked in analyses of office work, particularly in jobs performed by women (Greenbaum & Watson, 1989). As a result, technical expertise which is easily measured and interpreted is the standard employment selection criterion, and abstract qualities which are important when considering promotional opportunities are less likely to be included in curricula for training programs.

Technological change today is science based; therefore, at least a high school preparation in mathematics and science is critical. As females generally take fewer mathematics and science courses, they may lack necessary prerequisites to update their qualifications. Education and training must be viewed as life-long activities which are necessary to adapt to a changing environment.

Need for the Study

Research in office occupations has focused primarily on technological innovations. While electronic information processing has had the greatest impact on the restructuring of the office, one constant remains: women are still concentrated at the lower end of the occupational hierarchy (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986). Labour Canada (1990-91) reported that women made up approximately 90% of the participants in training programs for jobs in office occupations and only 4% of the apprenticeship clientele. (It should be noted that this percentage included typically "female" apprenticeship programs such as hairdressing.)

Nieva and Gutek (1981) stated that the majority of women are in nonprofessional white collar, clerical, and sales jobs. There is little research on how they choose these jobs. Furthermore, they explained that much of the career choice literature should be interpreted as preferences rather than choices which are expressed in the context of "feeling obligated to express an opinion" (p. 23). Much of the literature describes women who are returning to postsecondary institutions, but it is important to note that in addition to university transfer programs, the various community, private, and provincial colleges also offer programs of short duration (less than one year) and offer curricula directly related to clerical employment. Even though women complete these postsecondary programs, they still may not have a high school diploma or equivalent nor any prerequisites to continue their education. Furthermore, the criteria for acceptance into these short programs are based on the numbers of applicants. Consequently, their choices may be limited to those programs that have not reached their quota. Gunderson, Muszynski, and Keck (1990) stated

that perspectives which focus on the individual "choices" of women to be mothers and wives, thereby constraining their ability to earn, are inadequate.

The present models of career choice and career decision making do not adequately consider the many variables which influence the choices available to mature women. According to Reskin and Hartmann (1986), the evidence

> fails to support the argument that women's occupational outcomes result primarily from free choices that they make in an open market. It suggests rather that women face discrimination and institutional barriers in their education, training, and employment. Often the opportunities that women encounter in the labour market and in premarket training and education constrain their choices to a narrow set of alternatives. (p. 125) .

The literature acknowledges that women are still primarily responsible for child care and housework; however, until only recently has this been explored to determine more fully the extent that this has affected women's careers (e.g., Gerson, 1985; Hochschild, 1990). As well, the nurturing role is now being extended to include aging parents. While it is recognized that these family responsibilities undoubtedly affect labour market outcomes in many ways, "its link specifically to sex-segregated occupations is less clear" (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986, p. 127). Even less clear is the failure of legislation to provide pay and employment equity.

There is little empirical research in the area of women who are returning to the labour market in office occupations. The studies that have been undertaken (Abella, 1984; Armstrong & Armstrong, 1983; Boothby, 1986; Bradley, 1989; Dale, 1980; Lowe, 1980; 1987; Middleton, 1985; Peitchinis, 1989) identify inequities in both pay and opportunities for advancement. All agree that further research is needed in this area.

The implications for this research are twofold: to provide insight into critical aspects of educational practice and career counselling, and to provide insight into the realities of the workplace as it exists for mature women who are employed in clerical occupations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influence choice in the occupational selection process of mature women. These perceptions were studied within the context of the social, cultural, and economic needs of two groups of women: those who were retraining to acquire skills or qualifications so that they could re-enter the workplace and of those who were presently employed in clerical positions.

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) stressed the importance of education to women's career choice and development. They stated that, in general, appropriate educational preparation was a major "gate" for occupational entrance. "Education creates options, while lack of education closes them, and without options, the concept of 'choice' itself has no real meaning" (p. 54). Further, they stated, "The educational system has practised and perpetuated stereotypes and biases that have made educational progress and success in many ways more problematic for females than for males" (p. 55). The consequence is that:

> If not working (i.e., being a housewife) continues to be thought of as a legitimate "career" for women . . . girls will continue not to prepare themselves appropriately for employment and so remain at risk of eventually joining the cadre of "displaced homemakers" who slowly and painfully attempt, in their middle years, to rejoin the world of work. (p. 90)

Chao and Malik (1988) discussed individual factors relating to identity which may play a crucial role in the choices a woman makes. If a woman views herself

as primarily responsible for the family and household, she is more likely to experience conflict between home and career.

> If society disapproves of a woman who forsakes her family in order to build her career . . . the "choice" of becoming less career involved becomes a forced decision heavily influenced by sex-role stereotypes rather than an internal decision made by a woman as an individual. (p. 107)

As a woman integrates her career with family obligations, organizational policies relating to maternity leave, job sharing, flextime, and child care have a direct influence on choice. When a woman's career is secondary to her husband's, her plans may be constrained. In addition, her career plans may be influenced by sanctions imposed upon her by children, parents, and peers. Some women are also caught in a double standard imposed by society. For instance, the literature suggested that the responsibilities of marriage and family generally have been regarded as detracting from women's commitment to the workplace, but are viewed as enhancing men's (Gerson, 1985; Hochschild, 1990; Josefowitz, 1980; Rose & Larwood, 1988).

The Research Questions

The three primary research questions for this study were:

1. What is the nature of the career aspirations of mature women?

This question focused on the rationale which women gave for their choices and explored the degree of concurrence between occupational aspiration and action taken for career preparation. Questions relating to the meaning of work were central in an attempt to understand the underlying assumptions of sex-role traditionalism which still characterize many office occupations.

2. How or to what extent are socialization patterns perceived by the participants to have influenced their present life situation?

Women, particularly mature women, were socialized to assume the role of wife and mother. Often these women found themselves in a situation where they had to assume the role of wage earner. In the last two decades the number of married women who entered the labour market in a narrow range of occupations at inferior pay to men increased, as did the number of women who constituted the main wage earners in single-parent families (Statistics Canada, 1990). This question explored the extent that the effects of socialization influenced occupational choice and the individual's present life situation.

3. How have women's job seeking strategies influenced their position in the labour market?

"Most jobs are obtained through informal social networks" (Callender, 1987, p. 41). If that is so, then women become re-employed in jobs similar to those of their female cohorts which is likely to be in an area considered "women's work." Phillips and Phillips (1983) stated:

> Early in this century, two-thirds of all women employed in the labour market were in four occupational groups: professional (mainly nursing and teaching); clerical; commercial and financial; and service. By 1980 this proportion had risen to four-fifths, despite a fairly substantial increase in the ratio of women to men active in the labour market in the last few decades. (p. ix)

Often women do not seek professional advice at the critical stage of preparing to enter the labour market, and those who do are frequently given discriminatory occupational counselling which often has lifetime work implications; they are advised to enter discriminated educational and training programs which provide relatively limited investment in human capital (Peitchinis, 1990).

Definition of Terms

These definitions of terms used in this study were taken from Statistics Canada or reflect the meanings and interpretations of academic work with a moderate, liberal feminist perspective.

Career refers to an occupational career defined by Slocum (1966) as "an orderly sequence of development extending over a period of years and involving progressively more responsible roles within an occupation" (p. 5). Throughout the literature this definition is used synonymously with *work history* to differentiate between paid employment and unpaid work (for instance, housework and volunteer work). This raises the question: Is the role of mother or homemaker considered a career? The definition of work as determined by Statistics Canada excludes housework and volunteer work; therefore, for the purposes of this study the answer is no.

Construct as described by Kelly (1955) is a way of looking at the world. Constructs form patterns that enable people to make sense of their world. Kelly advocated a research approach which would encourage conversations about the interpretations of these patterns. He emphasized the importance of the researcher understanding the meanings which individuals ascribe to their own experience and remaining sensitive to the existential world of each individual.

Constructive Alternativism is the central philosophical assumption underlying personal construct theory. It focuses upon individuals and their interpretations of events, not upon the actual events. This study uses personal stories as a key component rather than eliciting constructs, as the intent is to reach a common understanding or shared meaning of past circumstances. The intent is not to change behaviour or encourage the participants to follow new directions.

Equality is an acceptance of and accommodation to differences.

Equity is defined in terms of pay and employment. Pay equity or receiving equal pay for work of equal value is closely related to employment equity which includes equal promotional opportunities.

Feminism is a doctrine suggesting that women are systemically disadvantaged in modern society and advocating equal opportunities for men and women (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 1984, p. 96). Feminism is concerned with providing equal opportunities for women to participate in the social and economic institutions that exist. Gaskell and McLaren (1987) stated that feminism is directed towards change, that it insists on the importance of gender, and that it attempts to address the inequities between males and females.

Gender refers to masculine and/or feminine traits which are culturally and socially constructed.

Job Search Strategy refers to the planning and management of the process required to obtain employment in a particular field.

Occupation refers to a category (for instance, banking) within which there are numerous related jobs. The sequencing of jobs within an occupational category forms a person's career.

Perception is represented by essentially two different theories: that perceptions are selections of reality, or that perceptions are not selections of reality but are accounts, descriptions or hypotheses of the object world. For this study the second definition is used. From this perspective there is no guarantee that any particular perception is absolutely true. However, the participants' perceptions, that is, their accounts, descriptions, and interpretations of phenomena are considered true (Bullock, Stallybrass & Trombley, 1989).

Sex refers to male and/or female traits which are biologically determined.

Sex role socialization is the process by which a person learns the behaviours and attitudes expected of the female or male gender. Previously, social scientists argued that sex roles were biologically based and that each sex had appropriate behaviours. Reinforcing these behaviours was important for the social functioning of society. Consequently, it led to a concentration of men and women in various jobs which were considered to be appropriate for their sex.

Work as a noun is effort exerted to do or make something, labour, toil; employment at a job, occupation, profession, business, trade, etc. As a verb, work is to be employed; to do work, labour, toil (Guralink, 1982, p. 523). Statistics Canada defines work to include wages, salary, tips or commissions, working in one's own business, farm, or professional practice, or working without pay in a family business or farm owned or operated by a relative in the same household. Work excludes housework or other work around the house, and volunteer work. For the purposes of this study the definition by Statistics Canada was used to differentiate paid employment; however, recognition must be given to the argument that housework is, indeed, work. The important cost to women is not that they work an extra month a year; it is that "society devalues the work of the home and sees women as inferior because they do devalued work" (Hochschild, 1990, p. 261).

Methodology Overview

This qualitative study provides a descriptive examination of the factors that influence choice in the occupational decision-making process of mature women.

Personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) provided the theoretical foundation, and grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) provided the framework for the data analysis using the four-stage method of constant comparative analysis.

Participants

The participants were eight women between the ages of 35 and 45, four from each of two categories: a) those participating in training programs for office work, and b) those employed in office occupations. The length of employment was not a determining factor in selecting the sample.

Data Collection

The data were collected from interview sessions using the general interview guide approach (Patton, 1990) with constructivist interviewing techniques (Fisher, 1991). Interview questions served as prompts to encourage women to "tell their story." The interviews were taped and transcribed and categories were constructed from the data to be used in the analysis.

Delimitations

This study involved only women between the ages of 35 and 45, who were attending a postsecondary institution to receive training for an office occupation, or who were employed in office occupations. They resided in a large urban centre in Western Canada. No delimitation regarding marital status was imposed.

Limitations

The investigative ability, sensitivity, integrity, and bias of the researcher may have limited this study. As one's perspective may affect the focus and breadth of the questions, care was taken to avoiding leading questions.

The ability of the participant to recall past events at the time of the interview may have been a limitation.

Assumptions

Women who were interviewed told the "truth" as they understood and recalled it. They responded on the basis of their perception of "what was," although recollections of past events would probably be inaccurate to some degree. In spite of this, the participant's perceptions of her experiences were considered a valid interpretation of the events.

The socio-economic milieu of the respondents was fairly representative of office workers/secretarial students in general.

The work domain was studied and interpreted within the total context of human lives; that is, socio-economic factors, multiple roles, and interpersonal relationships in the lives of women influenced their career choices.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the purposes, procedures, and findings of this research. Confidentiality and anonymity were observed in all written texts and taped interviews. The participants were asked not to use names during the interviews but to refer to others by their designations, for example, my supervisor, son, daughter. Any names that were mentioned during the interviews were omitted in the transcription. Participants were given copies of the transcripts and the interpretations formulated by the researcher and had final authority regarding the addition, deletion, and alteration of data they felt were inaccurate. They had the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

Organization of the Study

The remainder of this study is organized into the following chapters. Chapter 2 presents a review of related literature and is divided into four parts: theories of career development, re-entry women, the gender division of labour, and personal construct theory. Chapter 3 describes the procedure for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents a profile of the participants and excerpts of their responses to the research questions. Chapter 5 presents the results, and Chapter 6 presents the summary, findings and conclusions, implications, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section reviews the theories of career development which seek to explain career choices particularly as they relate to women and the workplace. The second section focuses on re-entry women, and the third section discusses the gender division of labour as it relates to women's participation in clerical occupations. The last section contains Kelly's theory of personal constructs which provides the theoretical foundation for this study. This final section includes a description of constructive alternativism, the central philosophical assumption underlying personal construct theory. It discusses the repertory grid and describes why the use of narratives for data collection was appropriate for this study. It then describes constructivist interviewing and the role of personal constructs in career development.

Theories of Career Development

Theories of career development have traditionally followed the positivist approach; however, there has been an increasing awareness of the shortcomings of these theories and emphasis is now being placed on the phenomenological position. Theories of career development within the positivist framework consist of three major classifications: trait & factor theories which attempt to match personological characteristics to job characteristics (Bordin, 1943; Holland, 1966; Roe, 1956), developmental theories which consider the sequential aspect of lifespan development (Ginzberg, 1951; Super, 1957), and career decision making

theories which centre on the process of selection and emphasize social learning (Krumboltz, 1983; Psathas, 1968; Tiedeman, 1961; Zytowski, 1969) (Figure 2.1).

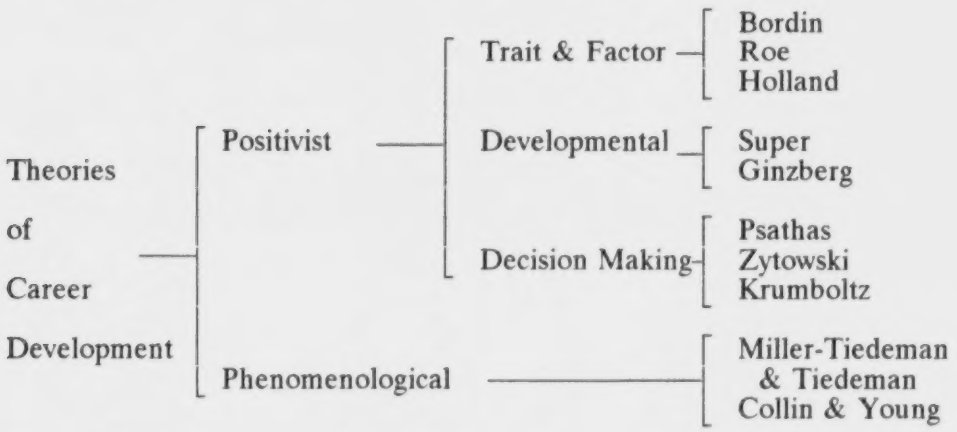

Figure 2.1 Classification of Career Development Theories

The major criticisms of the theories in general is that they are male oriented; they contain assumptions that work is a central component in an individual's life and that an individual expects self-fulfillment from work (Brown, 1990).

Theories that have been developed within the positivist framework have given considerable attention to the identification of patterned, normative sequences such as those typically followed by white middle-class males. The relevance of traditional career theories for women, minorities, and the poor have been questioned and found to have major shortcomings (Astin, 1984; Brooks, 1984, 1990; Collin & Young, 1986; Fitzgerald & Betz, 1983; Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980; Osipow, 1983). Collin and Young (1986) point out that none of the traditional theories conceptualizes in any depth the nature of the environment which is the medium of the individual's career or the political, social, economic, technological

and organizational forces which act as constraints and challenges to the individual.

> It is because career theories have largely neglected this wider world that it has been possible to transfer them from one culture to another and to assume the normative nature of career development. (p. 841)

However, the impact of new technologies and the resulting relatively new phenomenon of "midlife professional obsolescence" (Collin & Young, 1986) and the increased labour market participation of women have stimulated new emphases in career theories.

Increasingly, social scientists reject logical positivism both on philosophical and scientific grounds and in its place suggest the adoption of a phenomenological position (Brown & Brooks, 1990). First, the assumptions of these two positions will be summarized, followed by a discussion of the theories and their relevance to women. Brown and Brooks (1990) outline the assumptions of logical positivism:

1. People can be separated from their environments for study, and they can be further subdivided for study.
2. Human behaviour can be objectively observed and measured and operates in a lawful, linear fashion; cause and effect can be inferred.
3. The traditional scientific method is the accepted paradigm for identifying facts about human behaviour.
4. The contexts (environments) in which people operate are considered as neutral or relatively unimportant; thus, the focus of inquiry should be observable actions of human beings. (p. 10)

Collin and Young (1986) proposed that career theories "conceived in an orthodox manner within a positivist framework" constrain exploration in research (p. 842). They suggested that we seem locked into solving known puzzles rather than exploring new dimensions through the "phenomenological approach which

recognizes no objective, ordered social reality outside the individual's construction of it through subjective and intersubjective meanings" (p. 842). Brown and Brooks (1990) outline the assumptions of the phenomenological position:

1. All aspects of the universe are interconnected; it is impossible to separate figure from ground and subject from object.
2. There are no absolutes; thus, human functioning cannot be reduced to laws or principles, and cause and effect cannot be inferred.
3. Human behaviour can be understood only in the context in which it occurs.
4. The subjective frame of reference of human beings is the only legitimate source of knowledge. Events occur outside human beings. As individuals understand their environment and participate in these events, they define themselves and their environment. (p. 11)

The phenomenological approach neither predicts nor controls but searches for meaning. It assumes there is no single meaning and that meanings cannot be categorized. A number of social scientists (Collin & Young, 1986; Hoshmand, 1989; Wilber, 1989) suggest the phenomenological position replaces logical positivism as it considers the multiple realities in a person's life. Through dialogue it explores relationships with one's environment.

Logical Positivism Theories

Trait and Factor Theory

Brown (1984) stated that trait and factor theory is considered to be the first structural model of occupational choice making and operated on two assumptions: each individual possesses certain traits and certain occupations require more or less of these traits for satisfactory job performance. "The task of occupational choice making, then, is to match persons to jobs, so that individual

needs will be met and satisfactory job performance will result" (p. 317). Trait and factor proponents have produced a rich, empirically based literature which underlies much of the present day career counselling and includes the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, the General Aptitude Test Battery, the Differential Aptitude Test Technical Manual, the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, and the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory. Trait and factory theory has been integrated into Bolles' (1982) *What Color Is Your Parachute?* and into the theories of Bordin (1943, 1990), Holland (1966, 1973), and Roe (1956).

Although trait and factor theory is comprehensive, it can be criticized on a number of grounds. First, it fails to deal adequately with the choice-making process itself. Osipow (1983) stated that the relationship of traits to career decision making and the process of decision making itself need explication. Second, according to Brown (1984), what trait and factor thinkers have failed to do is to consider and adequately define "the universe of variables that affect the occupational choice-making process and to define causal relationships among traits and such variables as socio-economic status" (p. 318). Third, although trait and factor theory assumes to be as applicable to women and minorities as it is to white males, the "instruments selected to measure traits must be carefully chosen to avoid invalid discriminatory information" (Brown, 1990, p. 33). There is also the possibility that interest inventories "are constructed to relate women's scores to traditionally female careers and men's scores to traditionally male careers" (Brown, 1990, p. 34). Even if women do seek career counselling they may be advised or encouraged to enter traditionally female occupations which provide relatively limited investment but which also have limited pay and promotional opportunities.

Bordin. Bordin (1943) based his theory in psychoanalytic thinking. He viewed the personality as changing although he did not indicate what may precipitate change. Bordin did, however, address the issue of career indecision or blocks to career development, although he almost totally ignored the importance of socio-demographic variables. He assumed that his theory was global and applied to both males and females, as well as various ethnic groups and races.

Bordin (1990) revised his theory to include the role of play as the root in the metaphor of a tree as the structure for his theory. As well, he emphasized the importance of socio-demographic variables such as economic, cultural, ethnic, geographical, biological, and accidental factors such as job modification. He further emphasized the significant role that personality plays in the work aspects of an individual's life. In the formulation/revision of his theory he cited extensive research on the role of personality in occupational choice (for example: Elton & Rose, 1967, 1970, college men and women; Fisher & Fisher, 1981, clowns, comedians, and actors; Segal, 1961, and Segal & Szabo, 1964, accountants and creative writers; Terkel, 1972, menial blue collar jobs). There was no mention of clerical workers.

Roe. Roe's (1956) theory attempted to account for psychological processes that lead to career choice by determining a relationship between early childhood environments, need development, personality, and job choice. She posited that "childhood experiences and childrearing patterns influence a young woman to choose a career compatible with needs established during her youth" (Nieva & Gutek, 1981, p. 13). Brown (1984) stated that even though Roe acknowledged the importance of socio-demographic variables in career choice, she had not

developed an adequate statement to explain how this interaction occurs. Her position closely parallels Holland's (1973) later statements, but she failed to account for the actual decision-making process. Her reliance on Maslow's (1954) hierarchy was also perhaps limiting, but her theory allowed for early socialization determinants which are often considered largely responsible for placing middle-aged women today into stereotypical occupations.

Holland. Holland's (1966) theory was essentially a typology which focused on personality and environment. Originally, he categorized six personality types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, or conventional) and six types of environments (characterized by the people who occupy them), but in his revised theory (1973, 1985) he suggested that while one of the six types usually predominates, there are also subtypes, or personality patterns, that provide more complete descriptions. Although Holland in his revised theory did not provide any insight into the development and change of personality nor address the processes involved in choice making, he did attempt to include a closer match between the personality of the individual and the environmental characteristics.

The biggest criticism (Osipow, 1983; Brown, 1987) was that the scale is gender biased, but Holland contended that the results are indicative of the social structure of our society. "That many women and men respond in traditional ways is not an indictment of the instruments; rather, it is a reflection of the cultural influences on their development" (Weinrach & Srebalus, 1990, p. 65). Also, Holland tended to view personality as somewhat static which implies that women are not likely to change insofar as career orientation, interests, and goals are concerned. This ignores the catalytic role that various kinds of career

development intervention might play, and as well, this view is likely to perpetuate the status quo.

Holland contended that everyone's performance depended upon one's experiences as well as one's innate potential. It reflected the interests of the individual when the instrument was administered and Holland maintained that it required good career counsellors to help clients expand their options. Weinrach and Srebalus (1990) support Holland's view:

> Many individuals enter career counselling with some idea of what they want. They seek reassurance that their occupational daydreams are related to their measured interests. This goal appears to be reasonable for both genders. . . . Reassurance can do more than encourage good feelings; it can also stimulate thinking, clear understanding, and action. Use of Holland's theory can accomplish these goals equally well for males and females. (p. 66)

Even if women do receive career counselling and they are given this test inventory, it may only reaffirm their decisions to enter traditional fields without investigating other options.

Developmental Theories

Developmental theories tend to reject the matching approaches as an insufficient basis for career guidance and instead emphasize a life-span approach. Developmental theories hold that people and their situations change and develop, and that career decisions tend to be a series of smaller decisions of varying degrees of importance. Career education should, therefore, consider the sequential nature of decision making.

Super. Super (1957) emphasized the interrelationship of life roles. He proposed that a knowledge of both career patterns and life stages helped an individual to anticipate and plan for choices and adjustments before the need arose. He suggested that people ought to choose to enter an occupation which

permitted the most self-expression for the individual. This in turn would reinforce the self-concept according to the individual's stage in the life development process. That is, the self-concept would become more stable as the individual matured. The manner in which vocational choice is implemented, however, "is dependent upon conditions external to the individual. Thus, attempts to make vocational decisions during adolescence assume a different form than those made during late middle age" (Osipow, 1983, p. 153).

Super (1980) expanded his ten propositions to fourteen to include his work on life-role saliency. He made a serious attempt to extend his work to women by providing a classification of women's career patterns in which he noted the centrality of homemaking and the trend for increased labour force participation. He described seven career patterns of women, but "it is essentially a descriptive device, however, since he does not address the possible need for separate explanatory concepts to account for women's career behaviour" (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980, p. 45). Neither did he address the decision-making process.

Super assumed that work was the most salient role during the traditional view of the working years. Although he noted the centrality of homemaking, he described women's career behaviour from a professional viewpoint. Although clerical occupations occupy much of a person's working life, they are considered "jobs" rather than "careers."

Ginzberg. Ginzberg and associates (1951) introduced the idea that career choice was a largely irreversible developmental process that occurred over a number of years but was completed in early adulthood. The process was characterized by three fairly clearly marked periods with several stages representing a series of compromises between wishes and reality.

Ginzberg (1984) reformulated his theory to include three conceptual changes: occupational decisions were a life-span phenomenon, irreversibility was to be viewed in terms of the expenditure time and resources, and compromise was changed to optimization as the individual looked for the best fit between preferred careers and available opportunities. This introduction to the concept of career choice as being developmental is considered a landmark contribution (Osipow, 1983). Ginzberg (1984) also suggested that two basic personality types exist with respect to work: work oriented characterized by deferred gratification and pleasure oriented by more immediate gratification.

Decision Making Theories

Decision making theories attempt to address the question of why people enter particular training or educational programs or certain occupations, why they may change occupations, and why they may have different preferences for certain occupations at different points in their lives. Factors such as genetic predisposition, environmental conditions and events, learning experiences, and cognitive, emotional, and performance responses and skills are examined to determine their impact on the career decision making process (Brown & Brooks, 1990).

Psathas. Psathas (1968) proposed that gender role is the most salient factor influencing women's occupational choice. The intention to marry, time of marriage, and the husband's attitude toward his wife's working are cited as the most influential variables (Fitzgerald & Crites, 1980). Brook (1986) stated that despite the traditional and middle-class perspective of the theory, it offered an important contribution to an understanding of female career development. It did not consider the nature of the relationship between occupational role and gender

role; however, it was a first attempt to locate occupational choice within the larger context of gender roles.

Zytowski. Zytowski (1969) focused primarily on the career development of women. His central proposition was that the primary role for women was that of homemaker and that vocational and homemaker participation were largely mutually exclusive, consequently, vocational participation constituted departure from the homemaker role. He further postulated that vocational participation could be characterized on three dimensions: age of entry, length of participation, and degree of participation (i.e., traditional versus non-traditional). Based on these dimensions, Zytowski described three resulting patterns: "mild" which referred to early or late entry with brief participation; "moderate" with early entry, lengthy span, but low degree of participation; and "unusual" with early entry, lengthy or uninterrupted span, and a high degree of participation. While the model provided a major contribution to the study of women's career patterns, it excluded those women who entered male-dominated occupations unless they entered early and worked with no interruptions (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

Krumboltz. Krumboltz (1979, 1983) explained how factors such as gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status influence career decision making. Krumboltz, attempted to provide some insight into the decision-making process, as well as into the factors that influenced choice. Krumboltz generated a set of relatively broad-based propositions to explain the processes of career planning and decision making. He then developed hypotheses about both positive and negative influences for each general proposition which would partially validate the theory. This provided a framework for identifying and testing some of the career

guidance assumptions and practices that have long been part of the conventional career decision process (Borow, 1982).

In general, the theories reflecting the positivist approach allow for little or no integration of work and family. They make the assumption that a person's career is planned and offer no recognition to time constraints that may apply. Also the financial resources of individuals are not considered; for example, Canada employment funding is available to a maximum of one year. In the theories of career development there is little or no reference to clerical occupations, although they constitute the largest employment category. It appears that theories of career development do not adequately represent either clerical workers or mature women.

Phenomenological Theories

Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman. Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman (1990) offered a life career process theory, a holistic theory offering an explanation of how an individual perceives and reacts to life events and how the process creates self and context simultaneously. They explained that self is created as an individual acts upon external events, and that an individual's environment is created through feedback from interaction with the environment.

The environment is seen as affecting the individual in terms of the ways the person reacts to the environment, the support and the definition of conditions the environment provides. The critical ingredients of one's self are the situational, social, and biological factors. Miller-Tiedeman and Tiedeman (1990) presented their theory through metaphor, a sailing vessel, *Decision Making*, which

illustrates the essential individual life processes in the career, not with the chosen occupation itself.

> We think of career as part of an exciting journey, rather than as a goal-oriented drudgery that is imposed on individuals by society . . . Just as a ship's captain can map navigational routes, using the stars, the winds, and sea currents, the individual can make career choices based on nature, social opportunities, and personal inclinations. (p. 309-310)

Collin and Young. Collin and Young (1986) offered a proposal rather than a theory and stated that the field of career development ought to be examined from the perspective of the contextualist epistemology and phenomenological philosophy. This view conceptualizes the nature of the person's environment and its influence upon the person. It includes the person's response to occurrences and the internal and external adjustments which result from this response. They suggest the future methodology for career research and theory hinges on three interwoven or linked dimensions: the ecological/systems approach, the biographical approach, and the hermeneutical approach. These approaches lead to new conceptual views of career which are imbedded in a contextualist world view and include the interrelationship of cause and effect, accounting for continuity and discontinuity of development, and a subjective perspective.

Re-entry Women

Although women are entering the labour force in increasing numbers, the kinds of jobs they take are largely limited to the white collar clerical positions. The Women's Bureau (1989) reported that women who wish to re-enter the workforce account for 90% of the participants in retraining programs for office occupations. Nieva and Gutek (1981) stated that when women try to function outside of the positions deemed appropriate for them by contemporary society,

"they confront problems of acceptance, perceptions of deviance and role conflicts, confusion regarding appropriate and effective rules of behaviour, and obstacles to mobility within the situation" (p. 54). The effects of early socialization along with gender biases relating to peer networks, role conflict, and role ambiguity play an integral part in the career aspirations of women. Attention, therefore, must be given to the socio-cultural milieu of a conflicting value system faced by many women as they attempt to move from a family orientation to a work orientation.

The past fifteen years have seen significant changes in women's participation in the labour force. Almost 58% of all Canadian women now work outside the home. Although women are the beneficiaries of affirmative action policies, pay and employment equity legislation, and they are making significant inroads in the professions, as a group they receive only 59% of the earnings of men (Statistics Canada, 1990). This section first presents a profile of re-entry women and discusses the effects of early socialization and then explores the experiences encountered by women as they attempt re-entry into the workplace.

Profile

Until recently the re-entry literature portrayed women as having traditional jobs, little desire to work outside the home, and being quite homogeneous. However, almost all of the researchers studied re-entry students rather than women who had returned to the work force (Pickering & Galvin-Schaefers, 1988). Re-entry women have been characterized as white, middle class, with some college experience before marriage, between 35 and 40 years old, married, and a housewife with children. They have a history of paid work and/or volunteer experience and are financially stable (Holliday, 1985). However, research on re-entry women was often non-empirically based and samples

consisted of women who were planning to return to postsecondary education; the completion of their postsecondary education was inconsequential to their re-entry in the work place (Schapiro, 1991).

Holliday (1985) stated that more and more frequently re-entry women are represented by minority, lower-income women who are single parents and heads of households and single women interested in career advancement. "Today, displaced homemakers are increasingly represented in samples of re-entry women" (Schapiro, 1991, p. 31). Schapiro (1991) reported that earlier studies gave the desire for knowledge as the main reason for returning to school, but recent studies cite multiple reasons such as the higher cost of living, lack of job security, and the necessity to upgrade qualifications to be considered for employment. Therefore, it is important to consider the unique circumstances of each individual.

Socialization

Boudreau (1986) defined socialization as the complex process by which individuals learn the habits, beliefs, and standards for judgment that make them identifiable members of a group or society. The differential behaviours we learn as appropriate for females and for males in a given society constitute the roles identified with gender.

> Because these behaviours are, in very large part, unrelated to the reliable biological distinctions between the sexes, we use the word *gender* to identify the learned definitions of women and men. While *male* and *female* refer to sexual distinctions across all animal species, the terms *woman* and *man* are specific to humans and denote gender--that is, learned social behaviour" (Lott, 1987, p. 6).

According to Boudreau (1986), what seemed most important for the development of gender identity is the label given by parents and family. Gender role identity is a consciousness of sex-specific activities, skills, language, and an

internalization of these for oneself. How stereotyped one's gender role identity will be largely depends on the kinds of information the child receives.

Boudreau also described how much early gender role socialization occurs indirectly and unintentionally. If a child's environment is structured in sex-typed ways, the child will become familiar with sex-typed objects. One of the consequences is that children will then attempt to acquire and master those behaviours that they have learned fit these concepts. As well, gender differences emerge in children's preference for these identifiable roles. However, Hartup and Zook (1960) found that boys preferred their masculine roles much more strongly than girls preferred their feminine roles and that cross gender interests were more likely to develop in girls than in boys. As the child matures, experiences outside the family take on increasing importance. Educational experiences and peers become more influential at later stages of development and may modify gender role identity.

> The congruity of fit between the child's gender role identity and that of future significant others will be essential in determining the degree of modification, whether one starts with a rigidly stereotyped or an androgynous gender role identity (Boudreau, 1986, p. 77).

Lemkau (1983) asked whether particular personalities or background factors distinguished women who persisted in the work force and who made progress in their careers. She found that women who achieved in the public sphere came from families in which independence, personal excellence, and assertiveness were stressed and encouraged. These women also tended to be adventurous and expressive. As well, they were likely to have come from homes in which they were encouraged to explore a wide range of behaviours.

The Influence of Family and School

> Despite a rhetoric of equality of opportunity, it would be naive to believe that schools have relinquished their historic functions of allocation and selection. In many cases superficial change masks underlying sexist practices. (Boudreau, 1986, p. 144)

Social scientists have regarded parents as the primary socializing agents of the young. As such, parents are seen as transmitters of the general culture and subcultures, and as having an influence on individual behavioural patterns of their children (Smith, 1983).

Parental values must be seen as "intervening in a chain that starts with the social-structural conditions of parents' lives, particularly (but not only) their positions in the hierarchical ordering of the society" (Kohn, 1983, p. 5). Further, Kohn stated that mothers and fathers often do not have the same values, and as well, we do not know whether accurate perception of parental values is necessary for a child's coming to share the parents' values. He also stated that it is crucial to ask: "What are the immediately impinging conditions of a child's life? and How are these conditions socially structured?" (p. 7). Because of the close link between stratification position and job conditions, in particular, the opportunity to be self-directed in one's work, social-stratification position matters a great deal for adults as occupational self-direction has a profound effect on values (Kohn, 1983).

Following this analysis a child's opportunity to be self-directed in school is determined less by the family's social-stratification position than by the child's school level. In the lower school grades, children are trained to conform to adult authority; in high school, the training tends to be more self-directed.

Accordingly:

> the family's social-stratification position is pertinent not so much because children from families of different stratification levels go to different schools, but mainly because children from families of lower social-stratification positions leave school earlier, when they have been trained only to conform to the dictates of authority. Children from families of higher social-stratification position stay in school longer and are trained to be self-directed. (Kohn, 1983, p. 8)

Substantial associations have been found between the educational aspirations of adolescents and their perceptions of parental encouragement for continuing education. Educational attainment, as well as educational aspiration, appears to be related to parents' levels of education and to parental encouragement of college attendance. Smith (1983) suggested that an appropriate way to view agreement with perceived parental orientations was as an indicator of adolescents' motivation to comply with parental preferences.

Betz and Fitzgerald (1987) stated that the needs of school-age children for self-esteem and a feeling of competence may be better met in families in which the employment of the mother dictated that children have more responsibilities. Betz and Fitzgerald (1987), Hoffman (1974, 1979) and Smith (1981) indicated that working mothers may be particularly appropriate role models for daughters, especially if the mothers are in non-traditional occupations. Girls appear to profit in terms of less rigid sex role socialization and in the development of higher level and more nontraditional vocational aspirations, both of which are presumably due, at least partially, to the existence of nontraditional role models.

Hoffman (1979) also pointed out that daughters of working mothers are more likely to admire their mothers and to hold the female role in high esteem. As well, the needs of the adolescent for establishing independence and a certain "distancing" from the family may not be well met by nonworking mothers who

may see their central life role ending. As the employed mother has an alternative role in which she can invest her energies, she may be psychologically freer to encourage the adolescent's independence strivings (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987).

The Influence of Significant Others

There was a paucity of research in women's career choice during the 1960s and 1970s. According to Moore (1986), the process of occupational choice is clearest where there is, in fact, little choice "as in situations where the son expects to follow his father's occupation" (p. 871). The example given is that of farming and the point is that virtually no city child chooses farming as a career. Moore continued:

> Even where school systems provide vocational or guidance counsellors, their information is likely to be out of date, and it is not uncommon for them strongly to discourage Negroes or other minority groups with "unrealistic" aspirations. Thus the rare child who has overcome almost overwhelming disadvantages faces still another gatekeeper who directs him to a "vocational" course. (p. 872)

There is no mention of the inclusion of females even in the minority group context.

Harragan (1977) suggested that women have been excluded from many early socialization experiences that prepare men to cope effectively in the organizational world, particularly in competitive sports and other activities that validate the appropriateness of competition, aggression, and winning.

Gilligan (1982) suggested that women's early experiences may cause them to construct a moral and ethical structure that values relationships and responsibilities to others over individuality, "a focus that has long characterized the literature on masculine moral development" (p. 163).

Discussion

Children's early experiences often result in the formation of gender-differentiated expectations. These in turn result in gender-differentiated career choices and work behaviours. Obviously, the early socialization process is not the only force that shapes work expectations; if so, there could be little change.

Astin (1984) described a "structure of opportunity" which includes economic conditions, the family structure, the job market, the occupational structure, and other environmental factors that are influenced by scientific discoveries, technological advances, historical events, and social/intellectual movements as being equally important in career choice as early socialization. While she said that the individual's expectations are initially set by the socialization process and by early perceptions of the structure of opportunity, the individual's choices can and probably will be modified as the structure of opportunity changes. The recent trends that directly affect women give them greater freedom to choose a wider range of options; consequently, the opportunity structure is becoming more equalized. Such developments help to explain, in part, the recent changes in labour market participation by women. It also helps to explain (even though somewhat unsatisfactorily) why there are so few women administrators even in the fields of education and nursing, which along with secretarial work, are considered to be traditional female occupational areas.

The Experience of Re-entry

A number of issues and problems emerged from the studies of re-entry women. Although these issues and problems are interrelated, they can be classified under two major categories: situational factors and institutional factors.

Situational factors. Situational factors which influence re-entry consist of external forces which cluster around the interdependence of work and family, and the woman's integration into the culture of the workplace. Much of the literature focused on married women and the attitudes and behaviours of husbands and children (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1989; Gerson, 1985; Hochschild, 1990). Nieva and Gutek (1981) suggested that situational factors are probably more important than the woman's own characteristics or attitudes. If the woman is married, such factors as whether or not her husband is employed, his occupation, income, and attitudes towards her working are often decisive factors in her re-entry to the work place. However, "displaced homemakers--women suddenly widowed or divorced--make up a growing portion of the re-entry population" (Watkins, 1988, p.53).

Safman (1988) included racial and ethnic minority women, rural dwellers, and physically disabled women along with displaced homemakers as part of the re-entry population with special needs. These women often must enter pretraining programs to help increase their self-esteem and increase their level of literacy before pursuing job preparation. High-quality, affordable childcare is a continual problem and is particularly acute for low-income women.

Holliday (1985) reported that access to adequate financial support is a major hurdle for many re-entry women. Most financial aid is restricted to full-time students. Also, re-entry women seldom meet the requirements for scholarships and bursaries, and their multiple roles often prevent them from achieving the required high marks.

Institutional factors. Some of the educational institutional factors that have excluded women include quotas, admissions policies, stringent course planning

and scheduling, and lack of support services (Holliday, 1985). Institutions prefer full-time students and many have regulations concerning course loads and degree completion periods that particularly hinder low-income women and women with children. Problems also exist in evaluating outdated transcripts and in the transfer of credits of other institutions.

Discussion

Although it has been found that a husband's support contributes significantly to a woman's successful re-entry, little is known about the social support systems of separated, divorced, or single parents who return to the work place.

Another area which provides little information is the role of community colleges in providing programs of short duration. The literature classifies colleges as institutions of higher learning and/or postsecondary education but many of the programs offered are at the secondary level and many do not give credits towards a high school diploma. The re-entry woman who participates in these programs may or may not receive transfer credit, not only from other institutions but also within the same institution.

Only recently has combining the roles of work and family received attention from researchers as previously work and family were viewed as "complementary spheres each belonging to one sex only" (Nieva & Gutek, 1981, p. 38). In general, society still perceives the role of homemaker as the woman's domain and the work role as male. Although that belief is changing, women "are more likely to enter the labour force than men are to become full-time homemakers" (Nieva & Gutek, 1981, p. 39).

Women's Participation in Office Occupations

The literature related to the study of women's participation in clerical occupations can be viewed from several perspectives. Women's economic role in the historical context traces the evolution of the structuring of the labour market into male and female segments and attempts to give a rationale for the occupational segregation presently found in office occupations. The social context in which women view work explores how individuals experience their jobs and describes the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards associated with being in the paid work force.

The literature also examined the changing meaning of work and the labour force participation patterns of women. The modern economic issues resulting from technological innovation, particularly those relating to office automation, have provided controversial findings. Some of the literature reported that with increased educational or training requirements, clerical occupations offer new chances for advancement. Conversely, the "de-skilling" debate describes how jobs have been fragmented so that even less training is required with subsequent lower wages. Other studies have examined the problem of vertical segregation, that is, how a gender division of tasks, status, and responsibilities exists within specific occupations.

The gender division of labour provides both an historical background and a theoretical framework in which to contextualize the feminization of clerical occupations. There is a considerable literature with much speculation about the origin of the gender division of labour. Basically, two viewpoints underscore the debate: the first argument reflects the traditional primacy given to biology; that is, that genetic and biological differences are the cause of the asymmetrical

division of labour (McGrew, 1981). Most feminists and many sociologists reject these explanations on the basis that the link between genes, hormones, instincts, and behavioural patterns has never been satisfactorily proven and that this argument ignores the extent to which all forms of human behaviour are cultural and variable (Bradley, 1989).

The second argument has developed around the economic and social status of women before industrial capitalism developed. Some historians see a "position of near equality in marriage in traditional European societies, while others see women as prisoners of patriarchy, waiting to be freed by the onset of industrialism" (Bradley, 1989, p. 33).

Middleton (1985) viewed this change as derogatory to women's status: "this kind of view became for a time unchallenged orthodoxy for the new wave of feminists . . . it is the segmentation of the labour market, not gender division as such" (p. 24) that derive from the capitalist process. He argued that most class-derivation theories adopt the position that gender divisions in the labour market are a by-product of processes of capital accumulation and/or class struggle. He proposed that segmented labour markets are created by processes of capital accumulation and/or class struggle. Most class-derivation theorists do not claim to explain gender as a principle of stratification in the labour process, though they do suggest ways in which employers or male workers may reinforce existing gender divisions.

Historical Context

Prior to 1880, clerical work was essentially a male preserve, "but with the growth of large industrial organizations and the attendant bureaucratic administrative structures, there developed a shortage of suitable educated men

not already employed in more remunerative work, and women began to move into this field" (Sartoris, 1989, p. 186). Sartoris (1989) further stated that the invention of the typewriter around the turn of the century revolutionized office work and that typing proceeded to become women's work because of the belief that women have greater finger dexterity than men. As well, he stated that clerical jobs were preferred to farm labour, factory work, or paid domestic service.

Lowe (1980) presented a somewhat different analysis of how women came to predominate the office. His main theme is that the feminization process was central to the "administrative revolution which occurred in major Canadian offices during the first three decades of the twentieth century" (p. 362). He believes that this revolution facilitated the transition from small-scale entrepreneurial capitalism to modern corporate capitalism which saw the rise of large, centralized office bureaucracies and a growing importance of administration in regulating economic activity. As well, the influx of women into the office largely accounted for the growth of clerical occupations which in turn undermined the socio-economic position of the clerical group as women were paid less than men. As managers sought greater efficiency, this "created a new stratum of routine clerical jobs into which women were channelled" (Lowe, 1980, p. 362).

As well, changing entrance requirements for certain jobs created a decisive and permanent shift from male to female work. Lowe (1980) explained how the evolution of office occupations created a new stratum of clerical jobs as employers shifted their demand for clerks from men to women mainly because the requirements of the new administrative tasks were inconsistent with the

established occupational characteristics of male clerks. Feminization was not simply a case of women displacing men.

> Women became an administrative underclass because the division of labour had advanced to the point where male clerks were unsuited and unwilling . . . to perform the new menial tasks. Segmentation resulted; men became office managers and technical or professional personnel and women occupied the subordinate clerical jobs. (p. 378)

The Socio-economic Context

Intertwined within the historical context of gender role ideology are social and economic factors which influence the workplace. There is general agreement that men and women perform different work and receive different rewards. There are, however, considerable explanations for these differences. Theories which have served as a common reference point throughout discussions of the gender division of labour are the human capital theory, labour market segmentation theory, and structural functionalism. There is also a consistent debate concerning whether capitalism or patriarchy is the primary cause of gender inequality in the workplace.

Human capital theory. Human capital theory emphasizes that education is the equalizer in the job market. Ideally, people with identical educational credentials should have the same amount of "human capital," and therefore be equally competitive in terms of earning power (Krahn & Lowe, 1988).

According to Blau and Ferber (1987), the application of this theory to explain differences in occupations and earnings relies on the assumption that men's and women's life-styles differ in ways the theory itself does not explain, but which greatly influences returns to investments in human capital. They explained that society expects men to enter the labour force and remain in it until retirement age while women are expected to work for pay only intermittently, giving priority

to family responsibilities as they arise. Consequently, women will, at best, reap the rewards of their investment for a shorter time and may find their human capital depreciating while they are not employed. As a result, men and women make different amounts of investment and choose different types of occupations. Further, women tend to opt for jobs where general education which is useful to the homemaker is utilized and where there are no severe penalties for work interruptions. In return they accept lower earnings and less upward mobility. However, one must consider if this is, in fact, the choice of the individual or if this situation is dictated by the secondary labour market. Furthermore, the human capital theory does not consider the wage discrepancies between males and females with equivalent education and labour force participation.

The ability of the human capital approach to explain gender segregation ultimately depends on determining what women believe is true and how they make labour market decisions. "Unfortunately, we know very little about the beliefs women hold with respect to their own investments in human capital or the extent to which their occupational choices conform to the model of economic rationality" (Reskin & Hartmann, 1986, p. 73).

Bradley (1989) stated that women are seen typically to possess less human capital largely because of the interruption of their work careers when they have children. However, women who work continuously without breaks are still found in low-paid female jobs, despite the human capital they have accumulated.

> Where men and women start with equal qualifications . . . women quickly fall behind in the promotion race, even before taking time off for childbirth. Women who leave the labour market and return characteristically have to enter at a lower level, their "human capital" disregarded. (p. 64)

Labour market segmentation theory. While the human capital theory is mainly concerned with factors which influence the characteristics of workers (the supply side of the labour market), the labour market segmentation theory (or dual labour market theory) attempts to explain how job requirements within organizations create a demand for particular kinds of workers. It also distinguishes between primary and secondary sectors. Corporations and state bureaucracies in the primary sector can afford to provide employees with relatively high wages, benefits, job security, and pleasant working conditions. In contrast, the secondary labour market is characterized by poor working conditions, typically located in marginal, uncompetitive industries which must constantly struggle to keep wage costs down. However, for the segmentation theory to explain accurately why men and women hold different kinds of jobs, women have to be concentrated in the secondary segment of the labour market. While this is partly the case as women are overrepresented in service industries, women predominate in support services (file clerks, secretaries, receptionists) within the primary sector. The segmentation perspective does not seem able to account for gender differences in employment within the same industry (Krahn and Lowe, 1988), how labour markets initially came to be structured to segregate men and women, and it does not address the question of differences in male and female wages within occupations and sectors.

Structural functionalism. Structural functionalism stresses the significance of individual characteristics in explaining the division of labour by gender. Individuals are viewed as investing in their own human capital by improving their education, training, and skills for which they are accordingly rewarded (Armstrong, 1984). As wages and jobs respond to economic factors of supply

and demand and are based upon the individual worker's marginal productivity, it should follow that "the economy is indifferent to gender" (Siltanen, 1981, p. 27). However, as Armstrong (1984) points out, according to this model, "If women receive lower pay and face restricted employment opportunities, it is because they have made poor choices" (p. 22). She explained that central to both the structural functional and human capital approaches is the belief in the constant move to equilibrium and in a consensus on values. Although the literature identified a consistent debate as to whether it is capitalism or patriarchy that is the primary cause of gender inequality in the workplace, capitalism is essentially a patriarchal system; therefore, the debate does not lead to a better understanding of the inequalities as they pertain to women.

Bradley (1989) offered the perspective that gender differentiations appear to be clustered into roughly three orientations within the existing debates on the gender division of labour. The "production orientation" subsumes the gender division of labour into the social division of labour; the "reproduction orientation" presents the key concepts of culture, ideology, and reproduction within the domestic sphere; and the "joint orientation" based on the argument that an understanding of gender divisions must include both work and home, production and reproduction. It includes as key concepts patriarchy and male dominance.

Discussion

A perceived belief that work and family life are separate domains having little influence on each other has generally been accepted until only recently. This perceived separation was tied to the traditional gender-role ideology regarding the roles of men and women: men are breadwinners performing instrumental

duties outside the home while women are wives and mothers performing expressive duties inside the home (Voydanoff, 1987).

Peitchinis (1989) identified four myths about women that are largely responsible for their secondary role in the labour market and for the persistence of low wages and salaries relative to those of men.

The first myth is that most women enter into paid employment to supplement the family income and buy "extras." The reality is different.

> In 1986, 676,000 women in the labour force were heads of family units and 759,000 were unattached persons, which means they were not members of family units. Also, 392,000 had husbands who were either unemployed or were not in the labour force. These total 1,827,000 which is about one-third of the number of women in the labour force in 1986. (p. 34)

The second myth is that women are not committed to employment in the marketplace; their commitment is to family and home.

> Of the 4,977,000 women in paid employment in 1986, almost 29 percent (1,466,000) had worked at their jobs 1 to 5 years, about 20 percent (978,000) had their jobs 6 to 10 years, 16 percent (790,000) were at their jobs 11 to 20 years, and 5 percent (237,000) had their jobs over 20 years. By contrast, of the 6,657,000 men in employment in 1986, about 25 percent (1,640,000) held their jobs 1 to 5 years, 18 percent 6 to 10 years, 20 percent 11 to 20 years, and 13 per cent over 20 years. (Statistics Canada, 1986)

The decision for women to enter or remain in paid employment is of little consequence. The fact is that women enter paid employment at various ages and remain in the work force without interruptions for long periods of time.

The third myth is that women prefer part-time employment. In 1986, 26% of the female labour force and 7.8% of the male labour force were employed part time. One cannot conclude that this is the preference of women. As long as women remain largely responsible for the household operation, they will be limited in the amount of work they can do outside the home. Depending upon the size of the family, the household work can be a full-time job in itself;

consequently, paid employment even on a part-time basis is more than can be expected of an individual.

There is an assumption that employers created part-time work to accommodate the preferences of women. Actually, employers prefer to have them work part time as it is less costly to employers and provides greater flexibility in the scheduling of work. As well, there is a tendency to regard part-time work as casual work. According to Peitchinis (1989), "Most part-time employment is continuing employment, scheduled by employers in the same way as full-time employment, and fitted by employees within their time schedules to accommodate their other responsibilities" (p. 36).

The fourth myth is that equal pay between men and women can be brought about without a radical social transformation in the role of women in the family and in the larger society. The report of the task force on barriers to women in the public service indicates that legislation passed in 1981 has proven to be largely ineffective in reducing inequalities in the public service. As the federal government is the largest single employer of clerical workers, it can be generalized that overall this report is indicative of problems faced by clerical workers in the private sector. It appears that a change is needed in cultural values, in attitudes, and in behaviour.

> As long as women bear the primary responsibility for home and family they will continue to be regarded as secondary workers in the labour market, on the premise at least that it is not humanly possible to hold two full-time jobs and be efficient in both of them (Peitchinis, 1989, p. 36).

For women the realities of today's clerical labour market are harsh. Its characteristics are a division of labour by gender segregation, low-paying dead-end jobs, and a double work role because of their responsibilities in the family (Morgall, 1982).

Personal Construct Theory

The previous sections discuss the present situation of women employed in clerical work. But these explanations do not answer the question of why women continue to enter this field in record numbers when data indicate they are entering an area with very little to offer in work satisfaction and pay and promotional opportunities. Consequently, I searched for a theory that focused upon each woman's uniqueness, and that explained her behaviour and her interactions with her social and physical environment. I wanted to explore the circumstances of each woman's story to discover how she perceived and interpreted her situation and her available choices. I also needed a theory that could encompass the influence of early socialization and the multi-dimensional nature of women's lives. Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs met these criteria.

Constructive Alternativism

The central philosophical assumption underlying personal construct theory is constructive alternativism. The focus of constructive alternativism is upon the individual and the individual's interpretations of events, not upon the actual events. These interpretations are not static and are subject to revision and/or replacement. Kelly (1955) referred to this revision process as construct validation-invalidation. This is an ongoing process in which the person constantly tries to give meaning to her/his world by attempting to predict future events by making hypotheses, testing them, and if necessary revising them on the basis of collected evidence. Kelly maintained that our current ways of understanding and interpreting events and reality are subject to change and that facts and truths

exist only in the beliefs of the individual. Consequently, there is no such thing as an objective reality.

Kelly (1955, 1991) stated as his fundamental postulate "a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the way in which he anticipates events" (p. 32). This fundamental postulate was elaborated by means of the following eleven corollaries:

> *Construction Corollary:* A person anticipates events by construing their replications.
>
> *Individuality Corollary:* Persons differ from each other in their constructions of events.
>
> *Organization Corollary:* Each person characteristically evolves, for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs.
>
> *Dichotomy Corollary:* A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.
>
> *Choice Corollary:* A person chooses for himself that alternative in dichotomized construct through which he anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his system.
>
> *Range Corollary:* A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only.
>
> *Experience Corollary:* A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replications of events.
>
> *Modulation Corollary:* The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose ranges of convenience the variants lie.
>
> *Fragmentation Corollary:* A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other.
>
> *Commonality Corollary:* To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person.
>
> *Sociality Corollary:* To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person. (Kelly, 1955, pp.103-104)

Kelly argued that individuals are "scientists" in the sense that they want to predict, control, and understand aspects of their environment. Consequently, each person formulates, tests, and often revises hypotheses about his or her life-world. These hypotheses provide a reasonably consistent framework within which to interpret and construe events. The individual thus develops *personal constructs,* ways of construing or categorizing people and events in the experiential world of the individual, in an effort to reduce the complexity of the world to a point where it becomes understandable.

The major function of constructs is to provide for the anticipation of events. Through this the person can predict or anticipate, and thereby control or influence events. Kelly believed that all behaviour could best be understood as future oriented and anticipatory, and that it was these hypotheses that allowed individuals to anticipate that future and behave accordingly.

Constructs can be differentiated on several bases. If they are *core* constructs, they are central and basic to a person's overall functioning; if they are *peripheral*, they can be modified without changing a person's basic nature. Constructs that are *comprehensive* are broadly applicable, while *incidental* ones have relatively narrow use.

Constructs can also be classified as *propositional, constellatory, or preemptive.* Propositional constructs allow the individual flexibility in perceiving the environment; conversely, a constellatory construct is one in which other characteristics follow from the initial classification (for example, stereotyping). A preemptive construct disallows membership in more than one category (Kelly, 1955).

Kelly highly valued the direct personal statements of individuals; he felt that what the person had to say was more significant than any evaluative questionnaire. Kelly felt that a person's behaviour would make little sense to others unless the context of the person's situation was understood.

The Role Construct Repertory Test in Personal Construct Theory

The Role Construct Repertory Test (which has subsequently been called the Repertory Grid, Rep Grid, and Rep Test) developed by Kelly is an instrument for eliciting personal constructs. The test is aimed at role constructs and is basically a diagnostic inventory that provides a description of the individual's construct system. Methodologically the Rep Grid is an application of the concept-formation test procedure but it is concerned with how particular items are dealt with, more so than the level of abstraction involved, and with the participant's relations to particular people (Kelly, 1955, 1991). Yorke (1989) explained that although the Rep Grid offers a systematic method for displaying data in terms of bipolar constructs, methods for the analysis of rep grid data, whether qualitative or quantitative, must still be determined.

Neimeyer (1992) discussed the use of personal constructs in career counselling and development. He suggested that completing a vocational grid during discussions with the client had been shown to assist an individual organize preferences and values in career choice. Laddering techniques (prioritizing) done with the client can help determine the placement of constructs within an individual's overall system.

Yorke (1989) criticized the use of repertory grids for the transmission of meanings. He suggested that despite the considerable amount of content freedom, the repertory grids "severely constrain respondents . . . and that it is

difficult for meaning to pass through the linguistic constrictions of the grid matrix" (p. 65).

Viney (1988) predicted that the results of an increased emphasis on construed experience would lead to as many verbal as statistical interpretations of the resulting data. This, in turn, should lead to a better understanding of observed behaviour.

Other researchers (Bannister & Fransella, 1980; Fisher, 1991; Horley, 1991; Landfield, 1988; Mair, 1990; McWilliams, 1988; Walker, 1990; Winter, 1992) have also addressed these specific aspects of meaning and restrictions associated with repertory grid responses.

Narratives in Personal Construct Theory

Meier (1991) suggested that researchers who study special populations should consider non-traditional measurement methodologies that may be more sensitive to individual differences in these groups. Leitner (1985), Bannister (1983), Mair (1988, 1990), and Solas (1992) discussed the use of narratives. Mair (1988) explained that each person is totally immersed in her or his culture, language, place, and time; that we "think, speak, and act in the forms that our culture has prepared . . . We are shaped through the hidden rules of story telling that we also inherit" (p. 130).

Solas (1992) explored the use of language in personal constructs as a way of articulating experience. He explained that although a person may experience the world as a separate "atomized entity, the person should be understood as part of the social processes that constitute the social formation" (p. 390). Meaning is socially constructed; therefore, it is intimately related to the social system itself. As a result, the meanings people attach to experience are connected to their

socially constructed way of thinking and speaking, that is, to an individual's interpretation of his or her story.

Leitner (1985) explored Kelly's two characteristics of roles: understanding the other person's inner world and interpersonal actions based upon that understanding. Leitner (1985) explained that although role relationships may be deeply satisfying, there are potential dangers inherent in role relationships. For example, some of the negative emotional implications may include anxiety, fear, threat, hostility, and guilt. Because people differ from one another in their constructions of events, it is necessary to obtain clarification of their interpretations by having them expand upon details, particularly those which had a substantial emotional impact. This is best done by asking the person to further explain the circumstances at the time they are being related.

Bannister (1983) discussed the idea of "self." He stated that most theorizing has accepted self but dealt with it "as a segment of the person" (p. 379). In personal construct theory "self" is integral to the total picture of the person. Bannister (1983) discussed the eleven corollaries in relation to "self" and determined the relationships are directly correlated to "levels of cognitive awareness" (p. 385). He stated that lowered levels of self awareness may be experienced when the person is in the process of construing strategies that are unfamiliar. Through the personal story, the listener is better able to determine the degree of familiarity and explore the levels of awareness with the story teller.

Constructivist Interviewing

Fisher (1991) stated that the major thrust in constructivist interviewing is for the interviewer to identify and work within her or his understanding of the

interviewee's frame of reference. Concurrently, the interviewer needs to understand that his or her own construing influences the interview process.

Fisher (1991) described a number of distinguishing characteristics of constructivist interviewing. The constructivist perspective denies the existence of information per se; information cannot be transmitted from one person to another. Rather, we only know events through our own construing. This creates a need to slow down the pace of the interview because it must be started with the assumption that the interviewer does not know what the interviewee means. Implicit in this idea is that interviewer now has to use the "credulous approach" (Kelly, 1955). Fisher (1991) explained that through this approach the interviewer seeks to understand the interviewee's frame of reference and accept it as valid. This involves suspending judgment and asking questions that give the interviewee the chance to share meanings. This can only be done by providing conditions, such as accepting differences, that the interviewee is likely to construe as an opportunity.

The interviewer must also recognize his or her role in the interview process. Speech is always context bound as are the dynamics of a particular construct. Valuative words and words classifying people or actions often present inherent qualities that provide direct routes into the interviewees' perceptions of themselves and others. The interviewer must be cautious not to automatically apply his or her interpretations of these valuations or classifications but to explore the meaning with the interviewee.

Fisher (1991) explained an interview as a co-constructed story in which each party brings his or her own understandings, needs, interests, and feelings. Each

person, the interviewer and the interviewee, presents himself or herself through his or her frame of reference to gain an empathetic view of the other.

Personal Constructs and Career Development

Spokane (1992) discussed the nature of career constructs as "an interactive meaning system which can respond to input and to change or alteration" (p. 233). This reflects Miller-Tiedeman & Tiedeman's (1990) view that external events through which the self is created may present a reconsideration of career choice. Spokane raised the issue that constructs are probably "differentially permeable depending upon the client's circumstances and the source of information" (p. 232). Should this be so, it is imperative that mature women seek and receive comprehensive career counselling at critical stages. As well, we have not yet determined whether levels of intervention can be correlated to an individual's information processing ability. We must also encourage mature women to consider information and alternatives other than those which support their currently held beliefs.

Summary

The literature on work and career development is voluminous, but surprisingly little is written about mature women and/or clerical workers. Early theories of career development, particularly those developed within the positivist framework, have obvious biases and fail to take into account the multi-dimensional aspects of women's lives. The phenomenological approach acknowledges the subjective frame of reference and the relationships one shares with one's environment but the research is mainly focused on professional women. There is almost no

mention of clerical occupations although they constitute the largest employment category.

Many women re-entering the workforce need to upgrade their academic qualifications or take retraining. More frequently women who are returning to school, and subsequently to the workplace, are represented by minority women and single parents but there is little information on how these women selected their programs. The literature suggested that children's socialization often resulted in the formation of gender-differentiated expectations which, in turn, affected their career choices. Astin (1984) described a changing "structure of opportunity" which now gives women greater freedom to choose from a wider range of options. However, the fact remains that 90% of the women who wish to re-enter the workforce are in training programs for office occupations that have little to offer in job satisfaction or in pay and promotional advancement.

Several explanations are offered for the gender division of labour in office occupations. Clerical work, at one time almost exclusively a male domain, is now predominately female. Attempts to explain this phenomenon were discussed within the historical context of gender role ideology and the social and economic factors that have influenced the workplace. Peitchinis (1989) identified four myths about women that were derived from these explanations and that are commonly believed to be responsible for women's secondary role in the labour market and for the persistence of low wages relative to those of men's.

These attempts to explain women's position in today's clerical labour market did not answer the question of why women continue to enter this field in increased numbers despite data that indicate they are entering an area with few opportunities.

As the data analysis progressed, it became clear that the original categories derived from the pilot studies were inadequate to handle the multi-faceted experiences of the participants. The entire approach to data analysis and interpretation was then rethought. The literature was searched for a theory that focused upon the individual and that permitted the exploration of each woman's unique situation to see how she interpreted the events that led to her present situation. Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs met these criteria and formed the theoretical foundation for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This study provides a descriptive examination of the factors that influence the perception of choice in the occupational selection process of mature women.

Research Design

This study focused on two cohorts of women: those who were employed in office occupations and those who were in training programs for office work. The emphasis was on insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing; therefore, a qualitative analysis was selected.

An interview/case study approach was used to gather the data obtained in the pilot study. As the case study assumes multiple realities which serve as a function of personal interaction and perception, and as the phenomena under study were highly subjective and required interpretation, rather than measurement, the case study seemed the most suitable means to form a data base for future comparison and theory building. The interview method of obtaining data allowed me to explore relationships and events. Should additional variables or situations occur, a mechanism would be available to pursue them. The main disadvantage would be the limited predictive nature and generalizability of the study, but its exploratory nature and the search for insight into the phenomena outweighed this disadvantage.

The two pilot interviews pointed to areas where my interview skills required refinement to obtain more meaningful data. As a result when I began analyzing the data obtained during the first interview for the study, I found the original categories with the emphasis on work were inadequate. It also became apparent

that it was not possible to explore or observe other aspects to validate the case study. Although an individual can be considered the "case," the fact remained that the only method of data collection would be the interview. As the major strength of case study data collection is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence, it was decided to modify the original design of the study.

As this research attempted to discover how women perceived their choices when selecting their occupations, I wanted to learn about their career aspirations, the influence of their socialization, and the details of how they came to be in their present situation. I wanted whatever was relevant to this area to emerge from the data. As these issues related to human behaviour and functioning, qualitative interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method of data collection.

Before enrolling in university, I had done clerical work for approximately ten years. Then I became an instructor and taught in the secretarial studies departments of two different postsecondary institutions. I felt these experiences would provide greater depth to the study and be a source of "theoretical sensitivity . . . the ability to recognize what is important in data and to give it meaning" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 46). Subsequently, grounded theory using the four-stage method of constant comparative analysis became the framework for the data analysis.

The theories relating to career development did not appear to explain why women continued to enter clerical work in record numbers when data indicated there were few opportunities for advancement. I wanted to focus upon each woman's uniqueness and explore the circumstances that led to her present position. The literature was searched for a theory that focused upon the

individual and that permitted the explorations of each woman's interpretation of the events in her life. Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs met these criteria and provided the theoretical foundation for this study.

Pilot Study

Two women who were enrolled in a secretarial program were interviewed for the pilot study (see Appendix A). The interviews were semi-structured, taped and transcribed. A profile was developed for each person which included background information, educational preparation for work, perceptions of work, commitment to work, and the relationship between pre-work preparation and work. Based on these two pilot interviews, the following changes were made. The semi-structured interview format was modified to encourage participants to include their perceptions of choice more directly and to relate it to the positions in which they now found themselves. Greater emphasis was also placed on socialization and the influence of significant others. Prompts such as, "Tell me more about that," rather than questions were included more frequently during the interview. As a result, the interviews generated much richer and thicker descriptions, but the categories used in the data analysis were inadequate to represent the multi-dimensional aspects of the participant's lifeworld.

It was also apparent that the interview questions had to relate more directly to the research questions. The questions remained open ended but were worded more precisely. The prompt, "Tell me about your program," was omitted as the respondents related a great deal of factual information that had to be transcribed, but which did not contribute to the data base in a meaningful way.

After re-reading the transcripts, I was aware that I unintentionally gave cues; therefore, I attempted to confine comments to neutral statements such as, "That's

interesting; anything else you would like to add?" Also, I avoided asking, "What do you mean?" as a probe or for clarification as one participant incorrectly assumed that she did not explain herself very well.

If I suspected data were being embellished, I left that topic. In some cases, I pursued it later or at the second interview and in one case I confirmed the accuracy of the student's claims with her instructor. I did not want the participant to become defensive and I strived to keep the interview casual and friendly, not like an interrogation.

Selection of the Participants

Women between the ages of 35 and 45 were purposively selected for this study. Statistics Canada (June, 1993) indicated that this age group represents proportionately the largest group of the population that is returning to the workforce in general, with 79.8% of the workers in the clerical cluster being women.

Eight women were interviewed from a metropolitan area in Alberta. Four women from each of the following two categories were asked to participate: a) those presently in training programs for office work, and b) those presently employed in office occupations. It was decided that focusing on the experiences of a small number of women in an in-depth manner would be preferable to attempting to account for the experiences of a large number of women in a more general way. An attempt was made to include women in the study who would represent as wide a range of experiences and individual differences as possible to lend breadth and depth to the data.

Two postsecondary institutions that have secretarial programs and two companies that employ large numbers of office workers were approached for

participants. A notice (see Appendix B) was to have been posted on department bulletin boards asking for volunteers who met the selection criteria; that is, women between the ages of 35 and 45 and employed in the clerical field or in a clerical field of study. However, in all cases when I approached the institutions or workplaces, the initial contact person volunteered to personally ask those who met the selection criteria if they would like to meet me, showed them the notice, and then proceeded to introduce me to those who were interested in the study. After short individual interviews during which time the research project was outlined, the volunteers were asked if they wished to participate in the study which would involve one interview of approximately one to two hours and one or possibly two follow-up interviews. Twelve people were initially interviewed and three did not wish to participate. By mutual consent a fourth person who was in the midst of a marital breakup decided not to continue during the first interview, leaving eight participants.

Data Collection

Interviewing was the primary source of data collection for this study; therefore, it was imperative to establish rapport and trust with the participants in an attempt to gather meaningful data (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986; Gerson, 1985; Gilligan, 1982; Hochschild, 1990). Much of the literature on interviewing has evolved from more traditional approaches which state that the researcher should be detached and professional (McCrachen, 1988; Oakley, 1981). However, my need for establishing rapport while at the same time attempting to remain detached presented a no-win situation for both me and the participants. As I recognized that I was the major instrument of investigation and that women have different modes of thinking about relationships and the

associations of these relationships (Gilligan, 1982), I felt that my background provided a unique opportunity for me to identify with the participants. To deny this reality would deny an important aspect of the data collection. However, precautions were employed during data collection through development and use of the Career Aspirations Interview Guide (Appendix C). The guide outlined the focus of the questions relating to each of the three research questions and identified the areas to be explored. This helped ensure parallel data was collected as well as acting as a prompt during the interviews to encourage the women to "tell their stories" within these guidelines as much as possible.

All interviews took place at mutually agreed upon times and locations. The participants who were employed chose to have their interviews during their lunch breaks. Two chose their place of employment and received permission to use someone's office where we both ate our lunches and talked. One participant chose a small chapel where she said she sometimes comes "when things really get to me or when I have to think something out." The other participant chose to sit on the grass at the Legislature grounds where we both ate our lunches and talked.

The participants who were attending postsecondary institutions chose to have their interviews during their study breaks. One interview was held in a classroom which was not occupied; however, I felt that the person's answers reflected an expected or desired response as she carefully chose her words and answered my questions using complete sentences. During this interview I learned that she had a 1 1/2 hour bus ride to and from school, so for the next interview I picked her up after school and we went to my apartment. When she saw that my apartment was a mess, she seemed much more relaxed and at ease. As I was preparing tea

she offered to help set out some purchased baking and laughingly commented about the life of a student as I moved a pile of papers from the coffee table so we had a place to put our tea, buns, and the tape recorder. A subsequent interview with this participant was held at my home; I picked her up from college and drove her home.

I met the second participant at college and we began the interview in the staff dining room. However, I noticed she seemed uneasy so we moved to the student cafeteria. At the conclusion of the interview she glanced at the clock and commented that she didn't realize it was so late and so she would have to hurry or she would miss her bus. I offered to drive her home stating it was the least I could do since she was late on my account. During the ride to her home she began to tell me the horrors in her marriage. She had no objection to my taping our conversation and she continued to talk in the car for about 20 minutes after we arrived at her place. For the second interview, we agreed that I would drop off the transcripts and profile at college the day before our interview so she could read them beforehand. I picked her up and the interview took place as I drove her home from college. Our third interview was short and was done over the telephone.

The other interviews with students took place in a tutoring office in the resource room. Final confirmation was done over the telephone.

The original intent was to begin each interview session with a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) which served three functions: to obtain factual information for interpretive purposes, to provide a transitional time for the participant and the interviewer to relax and feel comfortable with each

other, and to provide a transitional time for each participant to assume her new role as an interviewee.

At the first interview, the participant filled out the questionnaire at the beginning of the interview. However, I felt it detracted from the spontaneity of the answers at the beginning of the questioning and in general got the interview off to a boring start. At the second interview, I asked the participant the questions and filled in the answers. However, she elaborated on several of the answers and although this provided data pertinent to the study, it created some confusion with chronology when writing the personal profile. For subsequent interviews, I used the questionnaire at the end as a checklist for any information that may have been omitted during the discourse.

As the two groups of women were at different career stages, the questions were worded somewhat differently but still served to explore their perceptions of choice as they related to career motivation, their job seeking strategies, and their early socialization. The first interview with each participant was taped and transcribed verbatim. These raw data were analyzed for themes and categories. As well, a personal profile was written for each participant. Winter (1992) suggested this technique as an aid to self reflection for the participant and as a vehicle through which the researcher can quickly validate his or her interpretations. A second interview began with an analysis of the personal profile to ensure it captured the participant as she saw herself and to determine if the themes and categories captured the reality of her lifeworld. Participants were encouraged to edit, expand, or clarify any points. The second interviews were taped and transcribed and served to reinforce the accuracy and validity of the

interpretations and to confirm any changes. Third interviews were conducted for five participants to confirm further interpretations and changes.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was based on the four-stage method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) which was later expanded by Lincoln and Guba (1985), Merriam (1988), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Yin (1989).

In Stage 1 incidents from each participant's story were compared and assigned tentative categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this phase the raw data were organized so that they could be easily retrieved; information was edited, and redundancies sorted out. The data were organized topically according to the categories outlined in the pilot study. However, as the analyses progressed and more themes emerged, it became apparent that the original categories which emphasized work and work preparation were inadequate to handle the multi-faceted experiences of the participants. At this point the entire approach to data analysis and interpretation had to be re-thought. It was decided that the philosophical position of constructive alternativism (Kelly, 1955) would provide a more appropriate theoretical foundation.

The data analysis was begun again. First, each phrase, sentence, or group of sentences that represented a discrete phenomenon was conceptualized. That is, two questions were asked: What is this? and What does it represent? Different colours were used to identify the various concepts.

During Stage 2, the process of intensive analysis, the level of comparison changed from "incident with incident" to "incident with properties of the category that result from initial comparisons of incidents" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 108).

The notes which formed the original data base were found to be inadequate and were expanded as still more themes and categories emerged. The raw data were continually searched for patterns and coded using the criteria established by Lincoln and Guba (1985): it should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information; and it should be the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself (p. 345).

For the Stage 2 analysis, the concepts that were identified from each transcript were input into the computer and alphabetized. This identified the number of times each concept appeared. These concepts were then summarized and presented to the participants at the beginning of the second interview. Each participant was asked if she felt the statements accurately described her and she was invited to edit or elaborate upon anything she wished. Also during this stage a Personal Profile was constructed for each participant and she was asked to verify it for accuracy and to edit or elaborate as she wished. In the third level of analysis similar categories from all the transcripts were compared and reduced to a small number of highly conceptual categories. The data were then checked for their fit into the overall framework. Although the fourth stage consisted of writing the findings (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in actuality the writing was done concurrently with the collection, coding, and analyses of the data.

Validity and Reliability

The question of validity (verification) and reliability (internal consistency) in qualitative research is considered to be problematic, but it is even more so with data which rely solely on interviews as the means of data collection. Self-reporting always runs the risk that participants will present what they deem to be

desirable rather than accurate. This problem is compounded when, as in these interviews, the participants were asked to recall events that happened in the past and to consider the impact of their choices on their present situations.

To address these problems, a Career Aspirations Interview Guide was developed which contained questions and issues to be explored with each participant during the course of the interview. This guide served three purposes: first, as a checklist to help ensure parallel data collection; second, to keep the interaction focused but still allow for individual perspectives and accounts of experiences to emerge; and third, to qualify, confirm or expand incidents that were related in previous interviews. To help reduce bias and inconsistencies in self-reporting, the pilot study indicated that this could be best accomplished by asking questions such as the following: Tell me more about that. Anything else? How did you *feel* about that? What did you *think* about that?

With permission from the women who were attending college, I was able to contact their instructors to verify marks and program related issues that were revealed during the interviews. For example, one student told me that upon entry to her secretarial program, she exceeded the exit requirement for typing but still had to attend all classes. Another student told me she had to retake an accounting course when she had received over 90% in it the previous year. In all cases the instructors confirmed the accuracy of the students' marks and their observations.

Internal validity. Internal validity deals with the question of how the findings match the reality of the lifeworld of the participants. For the purposes of this study, *reality* became the portrayal of the world and the interpretation as it

appeared to the people in it. The perspectives of the participants as revealed to me were considered to represent the reality of their situation.

The question of internal validity was addressed by having the participants determine if their responses were accurately and fairly described and interpreted by the researcher both in the transcripts and the profiles. That is, did the written account capture and portray the reality as the person saw it? Did it convey the complexity of human behaviour? Did it present a holistic understanding of what was happening? Was the reporting by the participant and the interviewer consistent? The research strategy included asking participants to reflect on the previous interview and to qualify and expand upon any relevant points, and often they did so. In fact, for two participants the second interview was far more revealing than the first interview.

External validity. External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to similar situations. The argument surrounding external validity is the appropriateness of generalizability. Depending upon one's definition of external validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline procedures that can improve the generalizability of qualitative findings and that have been incorporated into this study: a) a rich, thick description has been provided so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment; b) indications of how typical the program, event, or individual is compared with others in the same class are described so that users can make comparisons with their own situations. For instance, the following excerpts describe how three of the participants in this study felt about returning to school:

> It wasn't an easy decision to make, to go back to school. I went to that school, almost to the door three times and came back before I had the courage to go in. (Sheralyn)
>
> It isn't the first opportunity I had to go back. I could have gone back when the children were a little younger but I was scared. I was nervous and insecure about it, but basically just really scared. (Jennifer)
>
> . . . after having been out of school for so many years, I was very, very unsure of myself. (Sandi)

Reliability. Reliability refers to the extent to which one's findings can be replicated. *Reliability* in the traditional sense assumes there is one *reality* which will yield the same results if treated the same way repeatedly. However, this study sought to describe the world as interpreted by its participants; therefore, achieving reliability in the traditional sense was not feasible. Reliability was addressed by using an audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 1988) which describes how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the study.

Summary

This research began as a case study. A pilot consisting of two semi-structured interviews was done. These interviews were taped and transcribed, categories were derived from the data, and a profile was developed for each participant. These profiles became the "case." Some modifications were made to the interview questions, a Career Aspirations Interview Guide was developed to help obtain parallel data, and a short demographic questionnaire was devised to obtain factual information for interpretive purposes. The participants were selected and the first interview was held. The interview was taped and transcribed verbatim and organized topically according to the categories outlined in the pilot study. It was apparent that the original categories were inadequate

and the entire approach to data analysis and interpretation was rethought. The case study approach was replaced with grounded theory which formed the basis for data analysis and personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955) provided the theoretical foundation.

The data analysis was begun again. Three more women were given first interviews and the data were transcribed verbatim. A profile was also written for each participant. These four participants were then given second interviews which began with a discussion of their profiles. The themes and categories were reviewed to determine if they captured the reality of the participants' worlds. These interviews were also taped and transcribed. The four remaining participants were given first and second interviews and the procedures for data analysis were the same. Five participants had a third interview. The themes that emerged from the data are discussed using Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs and are approached from the perspective of the "self."

CHAPTER 4

THE PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

> In the story there are many stories. We are torn apart by the demands of different stories. We are criss-crossed by words and sentences. We are articulated by the story, permeated and formed into relevant being in the image of our story. We are also shaped through the hidden rules of story telling that we inherit. There are powerful structures built through our culture, in language, custom, convention. There are those in positions of given power, the engines of orthodoxy, who are allowed to speak, to be taken seriously, to be listened to. And there are many others who do not have such rights. (Mair, 1988, p. 127)

Eight women shared their stories for this research. As the women related their stories and the situations which led them to their present positions, the entangled, multidimensional aspects of their lives soon became apparent. The simple questions I asked had complex answers. Unfortunately, when the words were transcribed, they no longer conveyed the sense of urgency or the emotion in the woman's voice, the pleading look in her eyes, or her frustration as she threw her hands in the air. Gone are the thoughtful pauses as she searched for words to express herself or her apologies for taking so long because "no one has ever asked me things like this before."

I have introduced each participant with a chronological profile followed by her responses to the research questions. I chose to edit the responses as little as possible in an attempt to present each woman's story as she told it. For some, their stories were not easy to tell.

A Profile of Jennifer

Jennifer was born in Ireland, the second oldest child and only girl in an Irish Catholic family. At her father's insistence she left school at age 15 to help care for her sick mother and five brothers. During the next six years she assumed all the household responsibilities as her mother's health deteriorated. Her mother died shortly before Jennifer's twenty-second birthday and for the next six months Jennifer became more and more discontent at home. Going against her father's wishes for the first time in her life, Jennifer found a part-time job as a key punch operator in an insurance office where she worked for the next three years.

Here she met her future husband. After a two-month courtship they married and moved to Canada. Jennifer's husband is now a successful businessman and they enjoy the pleasures associated with a high income. They take frequent trips, live in a large mortgage-free home and own a lakeside cottage. She and her husband have been married for nearly twenty years and have two teen-age children.

Jennifer participated in community work and was involved with her children's activities when they were younger, but she decided to return to school to do "something for herself." Although her family said they were proud that she was attending college, she found that she was still expected to maintain exceptionally high standards of housework and to continue entertaining her husband's clients. She particularly enjoys having dinner parties with six to eight people and does all the preparations herself.

She has come to realize that things would probably not change should she work outside the home. Consequently, she has not looked for work since

finishing her program nearly a year ago. She has decided to resume her comfortable but dependent lifestyle and do volunteer work: "I volunteer at the art gallery and I like it. I like art and I like the people and I enjoy sitting at the gallery and meeting people."

Jennifer's Responses to the Research Questions

Research Question 1 explored the nature of career aspirations. Jennifer's responses to the questions relating to the rationale for her decision to enroll in a secretarial program produced a variety of responses as the questions were rephrased and interspersed throughout the interviews. At first she gave vague replies such as:

> I have been looking for quite a few years wanting to do something. I realize the children are getting older and didn't need me at home.

But this did not answer the question. Later, she responded with:

> It would give me the opportunity to go out and do something even if it's just part time. Something where I could be useful.
>
> If I were younger I would go back to school again and I would take courses and do the things that I wanted to do years ago.

When asked what these things might be, Jennifer responded:

> I think if I had been a little younger I would have maybe taken something else besides the business course.

When asked what else she might have taken, she replied that she would be interested in public relations: however, her vague responses to inquiries about academic requirements indicated that she had not researched this area. However, as public relations is considered to be office work, she had still avoided answering this question although she did state:

> I won't like to be sitting behind a desk all day; I like to be on the move. The kinds of things I'm looking at are maybe in the hospital area or reception type area where I'm dealing with people again.

In response to the question "Had you ever worked in an office before your work experience?" Jennifer proceeded to describe her five years as a keypunch operator before she married. She found this job to be tedious and frustrating. In response to the question, "At that time what did you want to be?" she replied that she had wanted to be an opera singer. When asked if she had any musical training she elaborated in a general way about her family's musical background.

> My father played everything and sang beautifully. My mother could sing, and my grandmother. So it's always been there and something I've always wanted to do.

Later, when asked why she enrolled in the particular institution she did, she stated:

> It was very convenient for me because my husband passed it every day so he could drop me off on his way to work and pick me up on his way home.

Her reply when she was asked if she had looked into any other institutions or programs was:

> No, I didn't. I felt this was best because they did upgrading. I *wanted* that. Even if I had passed the test to go right into the business program I still wanted that. I *wanted* to find out what I knew and what I was at.

Later, she stated:

> I suppose I didn't go to [another postsecondary institute] because I thought I might be out of my depth.

Jennifer described how she felt about returning to school.

> I used to look in the paper and I'd say "No, I haven't got that, I haven't got that," and I suppose deep down I felt quite insecure. I could have gone back when the children were younger but I was scared. I was nervous and insecure about it then. By that time, too much time had passed. I didn't mind doing upgrading. I wanted to do some upgrading because I felt I had to to go on. I had to get down to the basics and it gave me the confidence that I felt I was lacking. I didn't have to start at the basics, I already had the basics so I didn't have to start down around the bottom. I wanted to have a skill of some kind so that if I wanted to go to work I would have some choice.

Jennifer stated that she received no career counselling and since she had previously indicated she wanted to enrol in the business program, no other options were presented to her. When asked what her career plans were she stated that she would like to pick up some of the courses in the business program that she "didn't get." When asked if she could tell me more about that, she said:

> Lotus 1,2,3. Things like that. I didn't worry about them really while I was there. I was there to get what I could. Just to prove to myself that I could do it. Because for me that course, I didn't pass it, but I was passing it if you know what I mean, but I couldn't get to where I should be fast enough. I understood it but I just couldn't do it fast enough. I knew how to do everything but when it came to a test I was just a wreck. Nothing ever went right for me. Something always went wrong when I was doing a test. I mean I would pass it but I never felt I got the marks I should have got. I dropped a couple of things in the business course because I didn't want to take the tests . . . I dropped the automated accounting. Accounting is too fiddly for me. I just couldn't do it. I went in because I wanted to learn WordPerfect. WordPerfect and typing and office procedures and stuff like that. I found with typing, you have to get to 45 words a minute and I didn't. I got to 35 words a minute but this was the only typing I had done. You know, I was disappointed because I really wanted to learn to type and to type well but I was accurate. I guess I was happy. I mean I went in with nothing and at least I got 35 words a minute.

Jennifer admitted to being "quite terrified of actually going to work."

Research Question 2 attempted to determine how or to what extent occupational choice was influenced by early socialization patterns. Jennifer described her early education:

> In some ways, looking back, I felt that I was jilted of a good education because of the type of school we went to. There were some marvellous schools around where I lived but my parents wanted me to go to a Catholic one which was poorly funded. I suppose as far as they were concerned my soul was more important than my education. . . . I didn't take any sciences. The girls didn't do that, boys did.

She described how she was responsible for much of the housework and family duties during her early teen years.

> My mother was ill quite a lot so I was expected to stay home from school to look after her. I have five brothers and I was the only girl so my father expected me to stay home and take care of the family, which I did. I was the second eldest. Coming from an Irish background, it was expected of me. My father would have liked me to have stayed home all the time to help my mother but I wouldn't. Still I would have liked to have stayed on in school and gotten more exams but my father wanted me at home.

Later, when Jennifer found a job outside the home she says:

> I had limited education and I know my father was extremely disappointed with me that I wouldn't stay home and just take care of him and my brothers, but I was lucky that I had a job where I could work early and leave at noon so I could make supper and do the house.

Jennifer believed her husband was supportive of her efforts to upgrade her education.

> He didn't mind at all as long as it didn't affect the home life. He still doesn't, he's very good. He doesn't mind at all.

Jennifer found that she was still performing all her previous household activities in addition to her school work. When asked if she felt it would be the same if she went to work, she replied:

> Yes, it would be, I know. That's why I'm saying if I look for something it will be part-time because I don't think it's fair to a woman to have to kill herself. I mean, I was going around in circles trying to keep everything looking half decent.

She responded to the question, "Because others expect you to or because you like it?" by saying:

> Well, my husband likes the house to be tidy and it bothers him if it's not and I feel that he works hard enough that I don't want to start. Well, we've never argued about it but I certainly don't want to start arguing about the house. To me, our marriage is more important.

Research question 3 asked how women's job seeking strategies influenced their position in the labour market. Jennifer's job seeking strategy appeared vague and she had little concept of the realities of today's labour market.

> Well, basically I would like to something whether it's full or part-time, voluntary or being paid for it, but I'd like to get out and mix with people.
>
> I suppose if the right job came up whether it was government or private industry, if I thought that it would suit me and I would suit the job . . .
>
> I really wasn't into all the little keys and how it [the computer] worked and that but I'm glad I took it even if it's something that I'm not really passionate about but I feel now that at least I have an idea.

Research question 3 also focused on women's sources of information.

> A friend of mine's sister . . .
>
> A friend of mine did a sort of diagnostic thing . . .
>
> A friend of mine told me about it [GED] . . . and I took it and passed everything but the math.
>
> No, I didn't [have any career counselling] because when I was going through the upgrading I said that I wanted to take the business course. At that point I feel that they thought that I knew what I wanted so I just continued along that line. I think if I had gone in there not knowing what I wanted to do, I could have had all kinds of counselling if I had asked for it but I didn't.
>
> I have a friend and she works for a large company in town and she counsels people and she's always saying that I should probably have gone into something like that [public relations].

Follow-up

Jennifer has not yet looked for paid employment and appears to have little or no intention of doing so. Her family recently moved to a new house and she has been busy decorating it. She plans to return to volunteer work with an art gallery and is enjoying her free time. She states that she never realized how much pressure she was under when she was attending college and expressed amazement at how other women are able to "cope with the demands of husbands, children, the house, and school or work too." She has not returned to

college to re-take some of the courses she "never got" because she "is just too busy with everything else."

A Profile of Sharalyn

Sharalyn is the third of 12 children. She was born in Africa and is of Indian descent. Her parents were killed when she was 16 so, along with an older brother and sister, she quit school to go to work to support her nine younger brothers and sisters. In spite of her limited education, she was able to obtain employment with a newspaper and take evening classes to upgrade herself so she would be eligible for promotional opportunities where she worked. She received several promotions and enjoyed her work. At work, she met her future husband who was Irish. Within the first year of their marriage they moved from Africa to Ireland because of the political unrest and lived there for the next 17 years. In Ireland she found work in the sterilizing unit of a hospital and her husband worked in the newspaper business. They had a pleasant, comfortable lifestyle until her husband died unexpectedly.

Sharalyn lived on her own for the next three years but found she was extremely lonely and depressed. At the suggestion of some of her brothers and sisters, she moved to Calgary to join them. She found part-time work in a hospital in Calgary but discovered the work was sporadic. She decided to return to school to upgrade herself so she could be self supporting.

However, when she actually went to the school, she returned home three times before she was able to gather sufficient courage to go inside the building. She took the entry placement tests and was disappointed to find she placed "low" and would require approximately two years of upgrading before she could apply for a job-entry program.

On the advice of the college counsellor she entered the secretarial program even though she could accurately type nearly 60 words a minute and the required exit speed was 40 words a minute.

During the time she attended college, she worked one and sometimes two part-time jobs. She was nearly exhausted and when she was introduced to a man who asked her to marry him, she accepted. Shortly after her marriage she found that her husband had a chronic illness, was unemployed, and had two teenaged sons. As well, she now found she was responsible for all the housework and for caring for three more people in addition to her studies.

She admits that she cannot believe how naive and vulnerable she was but she thought that as her first husband had taken such good care of her, this one would too. However, her husband told her that she was not a good wife and he went to live with his sister until Sharalyn finished school. As a result, Sharalyn dropped one of her courses so she could take it in the fall and would not finish school until Christmas. "Thus," she says, "keeping her biggest problem with his sister" as he refused to live with her until she finished school.

Presently, Sharalyn is working on a contract basis through an employment agency and is taking a computer course in the evenings to complete her diploma requirements.

Sharalyn's Responses to the Research Questions

Research question 1 explored the nature of the participant's career aspirations. As with the previous participant, Sharalyn's career aspirations were affected by a family trauma. After she married, she was content with a routine job and stated that her husband:

> Had a good job so I didn't have to worry about having a super job. It was an easy job and I liked it and I got good pay for it.

However, when she came to Canada after the death of her husband, she had difficulty obtaining employment. She said:

> I didn't realize that jobs were going to be so hard to get. That I wouldn't fit into one of those categories. It wasn't from lack of trying or anything. I did work in a couple of places but they were temporary jobs. You could only get work for a day or two and I didn't have a really good education so that I could go out to work. . . . So there were several reasons for me to go back to school. One was we needed money and there are very few jobs. I needed money to live. It wasn't an easy decision to make, to go back to school. I never thought that I would have to go back to school.

Sharalyn was terrified of returning to school and when she found the courage to apply and took the entrance test, she was devastated. "I went in and they gave me a test and found that I was low."

After two years of upgrading, she entered a secretarial program. When asked, "What made you decide on the secretarial program?" she replied:

> Actually, I didn't decide. The guy who interviewed me in Calgary said that because I had a little bit of typing experience and that from working in the newspaper that it would be a good idea to do secretarial. I suggested nursing and he said secretarial, but he didn't suggest anything else.

In response to the questions about the secretarial program, she stated:

> It is not academically challenging. I can do it but you could work 24 hours a day and you would never finish it . . . it's busy work, always just more of the same. Like accounting. This will be my third time with this accounting. Do we need that? The same accounting? I did 10/20 the last semester. Before that I did it in upgrading. Then when I started in this program I had to do the same thing again. Now we are doing the same thing again on computers. So why didn't we do it on computers the second time instead of the third time?
>
> . . . and typing. When I started I had 56 words a minute and I had to take typing. I didn't mind because you can always get your speed with more accuracy. I saw some people challenging some other courses but not typing. Some could do this because they were already exempted because they had grade 12 and I didn't have grade 12. But I don't mind doing English. I like English and I'm good at it.

Sharalyn's responses to questions about her future employment:

> I hope to complete this course as I put in a lot of my time, my life. I hope to get a job at the end of this, otherwise, I don't know. I really don't know what the future holds. Will this all be gone to waste? Am I back to square one? Maybe ten years ago I would say yes, I will get a job because there were jobs available at that time but now everybody is fighting for a job. There are fewer jobs and more people fighting for them.

Sharalyn indicated a sincere commitment to upgrading herself. While she was attending school, she worked two part-time jobs.

> I worked in the hospital whenever they called me and then I went to work in a security place as well and that was at night time because I needed money.
>
> I don't watch TV or anything. I don't look at a newspaper. I don't even have a chat with anybody. My head is down again on those books until midnight. Sometimes when you are overtired so you can't sleep, so [I was] up again at half past five. I have to be outside waiting for a bus a half past six otherwise I wouldn't get here on time. I don't mind doing it. Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. If I can get through this course I will be very lucky and if I can get a job at the end of this all then it will be worth my while, but if I don't get a job then I don't know what I am going to do.

Research question 2 attempted to determine how or to what extent Sharalyn's early socialization influenced her occupational choice.

> I had to quit school when I was about 16. We were 12 in the family and my parents were killed in an accident. My brother, my sister, and myself, the three of us had to opt out of school so we could go out to work in order to keep the rest of the family so they could get their education and everything. There was no social welfare or anything like that in Africa. Although I am Indian, I was born in Africa and there was no such thing as social welfare so we *had* to go out to work in order to live.

Although Sharalyn's high school was interrupted as a result of the death of her parents, she continued to upgrade her education whenever she had the opportunity.

> I attended some of the evening classes as the job required things so I always took small courses like typing or going to learn English or something like that. I tried to keep up. I spoke English but it wasn't very good in the beginning so I had to educate myself.

Sharalyn married, moved to Ireland and assumed the role of housewife working part-time when she wished. After 18 years in a happy marriage with a comfortable lifestyle, her husband died. She now found herself in a vulnerable position: she had to support herself but did not have the means to do so. At the encouragement of her brothers and sisters she moved to Canada and tried to obtain employment. She soon realized that she would have to upgrade her education if she expected to become self supporting.

> I didn't have a really good education so that I could go out to work. I needed money to live. I couldn't live off my family for the rest of my life so what could I do?

While she was attending college, Sharalyn remarried after a brief courtship and expected that her husband would take care of her. Shortly after her marriage she moved to another city and transferred her courses so she could resume her studies. She then discovered that her husband was unemployed and had two teenage sons. She stated:

> I don't know if it was a good idea or not but it just so happens that my luck ran out and the guy I got married to has no job and I had no work. So you can imagine what it's like to be trying to cope with your homework and have a home life as well.
>
> In my culture the wives do most of the work. He is an understanding man but I have to pull my share of the weight. He helps me out as much as he can . . . He's not well at all and I didn't realize that when we got married. He did tell me, but I was so engrossed in my schooling that I didn't pay much attention to what I was doing. I can't blame him either really. It happened and now you don't cry over spilled milk. You just try and make the best of what you have. He's tried his best, but a woman's job still never ends.

In addition to attending college, Sharalyn described her regular household duties:

> They like everything ironed so you're ironing once a week. I only wash clothes once a week because it's just too much. But you'd be surprised how many clothes pile up. I do the cleaning all day Saturday so then weekdays I only have to do the supper and get the dishes and do other things like get their lunch and like the shopping and all these little bits. It never ends.

When asked how this was affecting her school work, she said:

> So far I have been able to keep up pretty good but I find some of the courses hard to keep up. And it's very frustrating because although you are following the directions some directions are so mixed up. Maybe it's me. I don't know but whichever is to blame, it's not easy to keep up with younger students . . . And it's very unimportant that we understand. And then we have homework. So much. That bag is so heavy. Really you could be reading until midnight. No wonder when you come in in the morning you have forgotten half because you are so tired. Your brain can only take so much. I get home around five although I leave here at half past three. By the time I get two buses and arrive home it's five o'clock. I do everything in the house and it's eight o'clock by the time I sit down again to do my homework.

Although Sharalyn was exhausted and had an unemployed husband with two teenagers who were home all day, she unquestioningly assumed the traditional role of homemaker along with her full-time studies.

Follow-Up

Sharalyn graduated with honours and was hired by the company for whom she did the one-month work experience component of the program. After two months' work, her pay cheque was returned for nonsufficient funds and the company went out of business. She returned to the employment agency where she had been working on a contract basis while attending school, but found there were only a few hours of work available each week. She recently moved to Calgary to be with her sisters and to look for work there.

A Profile of Janice

Janice was born in Edmonton as the youngest of three children. She has a brother 10 years older and a sister 14 years older. Her father retired when she was in elementary school and her mother never worked outside the home. Janice completed grade 11 and later took a bookkeeping course. She worked in the clerical field for four years, then married and had a son. She re-entered the

workforce after a one-year absence when her son was born. She divorced her husband when her son was nine months old and remarried six years later. Her son is now ten. After working at her last job for seven years, she was recently laid off. Janice has now enrolled full-time in a secretarial program and is sponsored by Canada Employment.

Janice's Responses to the Research Questions

Janice has just over thirteen years of work experience in the secretarial/ clerical field, took typing in high school, and a bookkeeping course at a post-secondary institution. Yet, she now finds herself enrolled full time in a secretarial program. When asked to describe the circumstances that led her to this position, she stated:

> I had a counsellor at Unemployment and he suggested, well, they don't really tell you too much at Unemployment, but I told him that I felt I needed to upgrade on computers and he said that he would help me financially so I had to find a place where Unemployment purchased seats.
>
> . . . and I don't really know anything else. It's so hard to get a job now I figured that I would stay in it and get my training on the computers and hopefully find a job that I really like. At least I have more of a chance this way. . . so I came mainly for the computers, the word processing because I don't have any kind of computer skills that you need now to get a secretarial job.

When asked what kind of job she would "really like" she said, "I'm not sure." She said that the career counsellor thought entering the secretarial program was a good idea and she agreed with him stating, "It was kind of what I wanted to do too," although she admits that she had never considered anything else and that the counsellor never suggested any other alternatives.

When asked about her previous employment, pay and promotional opportunities, she said:

> When I got out of school I worked for the government. At that time you just went in and put in an application and they gave you a job wherever. I worked there for about three years and then I started working the automotive dealerships. That was basically secretarial, office clerk stuff. I did some accounting, a bit of everything all wrapped up in one.
>
> I was just working for my pay cheque . . . raises were handed out on a yearly basis . . . but it was kind of a hush hush thing . . . they kept you in the dark. It was never discussed and they asked you not to discuss it with others. Promotional opportunities? That's hard to say because everybody sort of had their own jobs so it was kind of hard to work up to anything because you were given a specific job and that was your job. It wasn't working as a unit type of thing so I guess there weren't any real promotional opportunities.

Although Janice worked nearly all her adult life and was the sole support for her son and herself for six years, she said that she did not see herself as ever being the primary wage earner. She hoped that her husband would always have this role even though she stated, "Well, financially I pretty well have to work."

When she supported herself and her son she had "a very tight budget" and "because of my income my daycare was subsidized and that was a big help." When queried if she had ever considered changing occupations or getting something that paid more she stated:

> No, because I didn't know how I would go to school and pay for it. I was always looking, but as far as upgrading and stuff, well, by the time I got home from work and did the other stuff that was enough. As far as taking other classes I did take that one bookkeeping course, but I found it pretty hard because there was a lot of homework in it at nights and it was hard for me to do it. It was two nights a week and my mom babysat those nights but it was just like, too much.

When asked specifically if pay and promotional opportunities were important to her, she said, "Oh yes, definitely. This time I'll be looking for something more serious, something that I can advance in." When asked if she had any idea what that might be, she stated:

> See, I haven't really thought about that too much because my main goal right now is to pass this course. And I think towards the end I'll

> be looking more seriously towards where I'm going to set my career goals but right now I haven't really thought about it.

Janice said that she prefers to work, and about school she stated:

> I like it except I don't like the homework. I guess because I'm always so used to working where you go to work and you do your job and then you go home and that's your time. I'm not used to coming home and then doing homework and then having everything else to do. But I'm sure it will get easier as time goes by.

In addition to her schooling, she does "pretty well all the housework. My husband will (help) but I kind of have to push him but he will do it." When asked how her significant others felt about her working she said:

> Well, financially I pretty well have to work. So I'm sure my husband is fine with that as long as we are both making some money. My son is getting older now and he's pretty independent so he's okay with it.

Janice's concept of job or career progression is somewhat naive. She readily accepted the advice of a counsellor to enroll in a program of study that nearly duplicates her role in the workplace for the past eleven years. She stated that she did not have a career focus, but the work environment was important. "I do prefer a smaller place because of the people contact . . . people seem nicer in a smaller place." Later, she said of the career counsellor:

> Well, maybe I wouldn't call him a career counsellor. They don't tell you too much. They don't like to let go of any information. I found if they were sponsoring a class they make you do all the legwork. They don't come out and tell you that yes, we have so many classes open for secretarial. I had to come here and find out and I found that they did sponsor this class and then I had to find out if I was accepted and from there I had to go back to him and say that yes, I was accepted and ask if he would sponsor me and from there he made his decision. But as far as a career change, no, they don't help you that much.

Janice's early socialization was typical of her era. Her father was the sole wage earner and her mother never worked outside the home. Janice took a general program in high school which included typing and had no plans to obtain any form of higher education. She stated that she does not see herself as being

the primary wage earner even though she provided the sole support for herself and her son for six years.

Follow-up

Janice finds that her program "is really not very challenging. In fact, it is quite boring." She finds she has a great deal of homework which she described as "just time-consuming busy work" and said, "You have to do it because you get marks for it and you need the marks." She also stated:

> In some things I know more than the teachers about what it's really like doing some jobs they are teaching us about. I don't think the teachers have worked very recently, and yet they talk to us like this is really the way it is, and it just isn't like that. Maybe it used to be but it's sure not any more, especially the office procedures. I just wanted to take the computers and word processing but you have to take the whole works [program] and you have to do all this stuff before you get to go on the computers. I had to take a beginning typing class and I've been typing for years and years. And I thought I needed word processing but what they did in the beginning was so elementary that my son could do it. Maybe next term it will be a little more advanced. But I can't drop this program because they will never sponsor me for anything else. I checked and that's what my teacher said so I guess I'm stuck here. Oh well, at least it gives the teachers a job.

Janice has resigned herself to remaining in this program and hopes that it will increase her chances for employment in the secretarial field when "the job market picks up." In the meantime "it's better than running around looking for jobs so I can collect UI."

A Profile of Denise

Denise was born in the Northwest Territories, the third oldest of eleven children. She completed part of grade 11 in the Northwest Territories and came to Edmonton with a friend to visit her aunt and remained here. For the past 20 years she has had a variety of both full-time and part-time jobs which include cashier, waitress, general office work, stocking and cleaning shelves, and cleaning rooms and doing laundry in a downtown hotel.

She recognized that she needed to upgrade her education and was accepted into an academic upgrading program. About half way through her first year her father became critically ill so she returned home to be with her family. Because of the time she missed, she was forced to drop out of the program and re-apply. She was accepted the following year and took upgrading for two years. She completed sufficient upgrading to be accepted in the secretarial program. She plans to specialize as either a legal or medical secretary; her program was financed by Canada Employment.

She is now in a common-law relationship and has a five-year old son. Her husband was also attending school and was financed by Canada Employment.

Denise's Responses to the Research Questions

When asked what led Denise to this program, she replied:

> Well, I only had grade 10 so I decided that I really had to go back to school and I decided at first to go into the nursing program, the RNA program, but I had to do my upgrading and I had to do biology and I found I didn't like science so I changed my career goal to secretarial and I took a typing course and I found that I liked typing. I enjoy typing and I guess that's where it all started. Nursing was my first choice at first but not any more. I want to go to secretarial.

Denise decided that she had to find a better paying job when her son was just over two years old.

> I know that it pays higher to be a secretary than it is being a cashier and I just need a job that pays more.

When asked, "Can you tell me more about that?," Denise replied:

> Well, cashiering is part-time usually and they phone you up at the last minute because someone doesn't show up, and if they're not busy they let you go home so sometimes you don't get much of a pay cheque. Secretaries go to work everyday and they have nice clothes and things because they get paid more. (So you want a job with standard working hours and a regular income?) I guess so.

Denise described her previous work:

> I went to work temporarily at a drug store. I was short of money so I decided to make some money before I left. I was just stocking and cleaning shelves.
>
> I got a job at one of the hotels downtown cleaning rooms and doing laundry there. Then I started upgrading and dropped out and came back in a few years. Then I took some time off when I was having my son for a couple of more years. My boyfriend was working then. Actually I did work part-time cashiering, but he worked and I mainly stayed home with my son.

When asked if she was looking for new career opportunities, Denise said:

> I think I'm still going to go to school after this program to take legal secretary or medical secretary.

When asked if she saw the secretarial field as offering her opportunities for advancement, she stated:

> Yes, I think so because if I, well, there are so many things that I want to do. There's some things here too, but first I want to get into either legal or medical secretarial.
>
> I think I'm going to try to work temporary. Usually when I go back to my home town they usually need someone for the summer because somebody wants to take the summer off. That's what I did last year and two summers ago. I worked in an office for two months and then went to school.

Denise gave the following comments about her program: "Sometimes I don't feel like I know very much. There's so much to know." She said she found the program "sort of" hard but considers it worthwhile as it will increase her income.

Denise said that she thinks she would rather work than stay at home and when ask how her boyfriend felt about her working or going to school, she said:

> I think he thinks it's better when I'm in school because if I stay home too much I get too cranky. I think it's better when I go to school.

Follow-up

Denise was asked to withdraw from the program as she failed two subjects (typing and business communications) which were compulsory and which were prerequisites for the next term. There was no provision in the program to repeat

these subjects. As Denise was also pregnant and suffering from morning sickness, her absenteeism contributed to her low marks.

A Profile of Colleen

Colleen was born in the West Indies as the third of seven children. She graduated from high school in the West Indies and planned to become a teacher. However, she had to go to work to earn the tuition fees so she enrolled in a commercial school to obtain clerical skills as she thought this would get her a better job and she would be able to go to university sooner. She found a clerical position in an insurance office where she met her husband. She continued working only taking a few months off for the birth of two children. After the birth of her third child, she spent one year at home. The family then moved to eastern Canada. Colleen found work as a secretary in a real estate office and, acting on the advice of her supervisor, she obtained her realtor's license. She joined the sales team and worked in sales for five years.

Her husband was laid off from his job but found work in a northern Alberta city. The family moved and Colleen stayed home for ten years working as a full-time wife and mother.

Seven years ago with the breakup of her marriage it was necessary for her to re-enter the workforce. She was able to find a "Priority Employment Program" (PEP) position which paid $5.50 an hour for six months. She then obtained her present clerical position and has now been working at this job for just over six years. Although she wants to continue her education, she finds that with her low salary, she cannot afford the high costs of the individual courses. She also feels that she "will die of old age" before finishing her degree, going at it one course at

a time. Because she was employed, she was turned down for a student loan; consequently, she was unable to attend university full time even though she had been accepted.

Colleen's Responses to the Research Questions

While filling out the demographic questionnaire, in response to the question "What is your job title?" Colleen stated:

> My job description says "Records Systems Analyst" but the company phone book says "File Clerk." So I guess a file clerk is a file clerk no matter what title you use.

Colleen re-entered the workplace because her marriage was failing and she needed money to live. She began by applying and being accepted for a government position in a government sponsored program (PEP) which paid minimum wage for six months and then ended. She described the program as:

> One of these government programs to provide you with training. It's mostly for people wanting to re-enter the work force when you've been out for a while and you need some training. I [didn't have to go to classes]. . . because I had years of experience in this since my first job. . . I wasn't too choosy. I just wanted work.

Colleen did not consider any other types of jobs at this point. Because her background was clerical, she felt she had the best chance of obtaining work in the same field. When asked how she got into clerical work in the first place she said:

> After I finished school I went to a commercial school. At that time I was doing that mainly to make some money so I could go on to university to take education . . . Once I started working I guess the desire just wasn't that great again. After I worked for a couple of years I started having children and I still worked. During the time when I had my first two I was still working with the insurance company. I quit and then I had my last child and went back to work about a year later. I worked at the construction company doing their cost accounting. I worked with them for approximately three years.
>
> After I moved to Canada I got into real estate. I started as a part-time secretary in the evenings and then my boss said I should get my

> license so I did the course and got into sales. I did sales for four and a half years . . . but I got sidetracked with what my husband wanted [which was for me to stay home].

When asked if there are some things about her present job that she did not expect, Colleen commented on the workload, "It's tremendous." She described her position:

> It's like a shop, I guess. People come in and ask for things and I find it. Our branch is a rather large one. It's pretty well province wide so it's a fair size. It's not just what's owned by the province but also what's privately owned. It's a schmozzle. It's not something just cut and dried. [People come in and they want to know where something is and it's your job to find it?] Yes, and within two minutes, and if you're longer than that somebody starts to, you know, the comments for the most part are very displeasing.

Colleen's responses about her expectations from work and her career focus include:

> I didn't come in with any definite expectations and I didn't really come in to stay in it either. I didn't expect to stay at all but I had bills to pay.
>
> Actually I was planning to go to [a post-secondary institution] and take a course maybe in something else. I thought about computer programming but I couldn't get into it at the time. I was looking for something that would give me a better salary. I did go to the school and got some information but I just didn't pursue it because financially it was impossible because I would have to pay for it myself and that along with my bills, well, I just couldn't afford it.
>
> (Were you looking at computer programming or word processing?)
>
> A systems analyst. It was definitely programming, a two-year course, not word processing . . . I wanted to become a teacher when I was young, but now the time it would take me to complete anything I would be too old and also the money. I was turned down for a student loan because I had a job and they seemed to think my husband would or should pay so I was unable to attend even though I did fill out the forms and was accepted and I lost my application fee and I will die of old age before I finish my degree going at it one course at a time.

The second research question focused on multiple roles and the extent to which early socialization patterns influence occupational choice. Colleen

preferred to work even with three young children, but at the insistence of her husband, left the work force for approximately ten years to care for her family. She said:

> That was a mistake. Looking back I think I could have continued with what I was doing [real estate sales] and managed to keep a home and my children, but I got sidetracked with what my husband wanted. He didn't like it [her working]. When I needed his support, say when I was going on an appointment, he would do something to upset me.
>
> (Like?)
>
> He would go off somewhere with the only car we had. I was successful [at real estate] when I worked at it but there were so many times when I couldn't do what I wanted to do with it because he was always telling me to quit, and I would say, "Well, if I have to quit that's the end of our marriage," and then he would back off for a little while which would give me a little breather and then he would get back on to the subject again. He was mainly trying to control my life.
>
> When I wasn't working, I could get up and sit and watch TV all day and he would come in and he would cook supper, and if he wanted a shirt, he would iron it himself, and on the weekend, we would clean up together. But if I'm working, he sits before the TV and he wants a drink, he wants a shirt ironed, or he's hungry. There was no help from him then.
>
> I like working. It gives me a reason to get up in the morning. When I didn't work, I wouldn't get up until 11 o'clock. I like working outside the home, let's put it that way. There's a little difference. I do that (housework) only because I have to.

Colleen explained that her children were very supportive of her working and related an incident when her son was around ten years old and told her to divorce his father.

> I had a leg injury and had a full leg cast and his father left for two days without a word to anyone. He knew I could not make it upstairs or downstairs by myself and the children were in school all day. My son was furious and he cried and told me to divorce his father. He wanted me to do something that would make me happy.

Although Colleen stated that pay and promotional opportunities were important to her, she has not applied for any other positions or transfers. She

cited family responsibilities and the need for security as reasons why she cannot take risks.

> There have been a few [jobs] that were interesting, but then I had [grandchild whom she was caring for so her daughter could finish school] and the job meant travelling throughout the province. That would have been a problem so I did not apply, but I think I had a fairly good chance on it. And I procrastinated too long. You can tell I'm not very kind to myself. But at this time when things are changing so fast, if you have some basic form of security anywhere, you hold on to that. And right now I need some security. And the jobs are only temporary and I would have to give up my permanent status and I can't afford to do that.

The third research question asked how women's job seeking strategies influenced their positions in the labour market. Colleen successfully changed from clerical work to sales. However, in spite of her previous success in real estate she did not feel confident that she could give up a secure, steady but low income for a potentially more lucrative job but with a higher risk. Instead, she returned to the familiar area of the clerical field and works "just so I can pay my bills." She stated that she sometimes felt rewarded "when someone asks me for something that they think is impossible and I come up with it, but basically I just work to pay my bills."

Follow-up

Colleen said that after she read her transcripts, she looked into returning to real estate. However, after she spoke with several realtors, she found that the market was extremely competitive and it seemed unlikely she would improve her financial situation. As well, she would have to buy a car and a new wardrobe.

She is currently more satisfied with her present job as her working conditions have improved. When Colleen left for holidays for two weeks, her supervisor felt the present staff could cover her position; however, he soon recognized the amount of work that was involved. Also, the complexity of the

system prevented employing casual help on an as-needed basis. Because her department was required to absorb another area, the work load was increased to the degree that another employee was required. Colleen enjoys the companionship.

> It's so nice to have someone to eat lunch with and talk to. She's divorced and has grown up kids and one of her kids was given symphony tickets so she gave them to us. So the two of us went to the symphony. We had never been before so it was kind of scary. I didn't know what to wear or anything but neither did she. We asked some others at work and they said that what we wear to work was fine. So we splurged and had supper out and went to the symphony. I thought that stuff was all la-de-da and uppity and we were so nervous we were giddy. But we had a wonderful, wonderful time. We tried to remember when the last time was that either one of us had gone out and just had fun. I don't think I ever have.

A Profile of BJ

BJ was born in Canada and has one younger sister. Her father was in the services so the family lived on army bases in small towns. Because the family moved frequently, BJ did not have many close friends as a child.

Her parents were very strict and very "traditional, from the old country." She graduated from high school with honours and came to Edmonton with $20 to enroll at the University of Alberta with plans to become a civil engineer. She received no support either emotionally or financially to pursue her goal.

BJ enrolled in a government sponsored secretarial course because it was the quickest one to get into and offered financial support while she was in school. She completed her course early and obtained full-time work within two days. She supported herself as cheaply as she could and managed to save $1200 towards her tuition in one and a half years on her $4500 a year salary. However, she met her future husband where she was working, married, and used her tuition fund as a down payment on a house. BJ was able to continuing working

during her two pregnancies "by taking special care not to show." After the birth of her second child she took a five-year leave to be home with her children before returning to the paid workforce and has worked full time ever since.

BJ has provided the primary source income as her husband has had three distinct careers and his type of employment was subject to layoffs and labour disputes. When he worked, "he made big bucks, but you were never sure from one day to the next if he would be working."

BJ made a conscious effort to counteract much of her early socialization with her children, particularly in matters relating to choice. She expressed concern over the lack of progress she felt women have made in the workplace, and she is particularly concerned about issues relating to harassment, and pay and employment equity.

BJ's Responses to Research Questions

BJ entered the clerical field as an interim measure which would allow her to save enough money so she could enter civil engineering at university.

> I needed money to go to university and this was about the only field that would hire somebody that didn't have experience or a degree . . . I got my training through the government AVT (Alberta Vocational Training) program and it was the quickest one to get into.

When she first entered the workforce BJ showed a strong commitment and a strong career focus towards achieving her goal of entering engineering.

> When I graduated from high school, I had honours, over 80% average. I came here with $20 in my pocket, got off the bus and went to the YWCA, booked a room and spent $19 on my month's rent and then proceeded to campus . . . They (counsellors) were quite clear that this engineering was for males, not females. I found out that I couldn't get any funding and that there would be no way that I could possibly go to university unless I had the money up front. I know that at that point my mind went blank. But you see when you are 17 and you are coming in from a small town into the big city and you've been brought up on army bases where everyone takes care of you and you come into the big city and there's nobody here and when I came up, it was just

> strictly me. And the counsellor told me about AVC and that's how I got into this. They paid you $10.50 a week and that gave me enough money so I could eat and put some aside to save for university. Actually that gave me a chance to save $20 a month.
>
> Then I got a job making $145 a month and I figured that I would have to work a year and a half to save enough for a year's tuition. What I was hoping was to continue with a part-time job and stay in university. I worked until I had $1200 saved up, and then I met my husband and we got married and it went as a down payment on the house.
>
> Then it seemed every time we sort of got ahead, my husband got laid off which meant that my husband had three careers and I just went back to work. So that's how I got into this as a permanent career for nearly 30 years.

BJ said that she had no expectations from work when she started but she believes that:

> A person who treats me as an equal, whether they are professional or not will get an awful lot out of me. But the person who treats me as quote "just clerical" and they do say it with a sneer . . . then that's exactly what they get back.

BJ's early socialization experiences are inextricably tied to her career choices. She stated that:

> It [civil engineering] was a very realistic goal. But my parents, or really just my father, did not believe in women going to university so therefore for money, I had to earn it and I just didn't quite make it.
>
> At the time there were no other forms of financing or student loans, at least to my knowledge. I had spoken to counsellors and they had said no and they all sort of raised their eyebrows at me.
>
> I have always been afraid of failing. That's something that my parents were forces behind because failure was a definite no-no. And it didn't matter how, but you had to succeed and that was basically it.

BJ felt that her choices when she was younger were non-existent rather than limited.

> I had no choice. I was told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. It was just the way it was. My parents were both from the old country and I was the daughter. I would be on view but I must behave with the appropriate manners and follow in the appropriate category of getting married, raising a family and taking care of my own brood.

Although BJ's early socialization influenced the available choices regarding her career, she did not follow the usual pattern of leaving the workforce during pregnancy and remaining away until her children were older.

> When I got pregnant I worked until the end of September and she was born October 24. I was lucky. I was one of the fortunate ones because when you got pregnant you had to remove yourself as soon as you showed . . . and as long as I never showed I could stay. I only gained 17 pounds and everybody kept saying that marriage agrees with you and I would say, "Ya." But then my husband got laid off in December and I was back at work on January 2.
>
> I think when we first got married he [husband] was of the mind that I was going to stay home and raise my family. And then he found out that with the layoffs and his change in careers that we couldn't do it and survive. His upbringing was quite different from mine and he didn't like it at first but after his first layoff, he liked it and after that he realized that we needed it; he only has a grade 10 education.

BJ explained that her parents did not approve of her working. "We had some really good fights about it. I think that was one big split with my dad." After her father died, BJ's mother came to live with them.

> So when Dad passed away and I saw her failing, I brought her home and she lived with us. And that's the hard part because it's very difficult having an in-law living with you (from husband's point of view). I don't recommend that unless you are very strong and it takes a very strong marriage. But mother was great. When she died in '89, she was 93 years old and she was very, very active until the year before when the doctor diagnosed her with cancer.

BJ described how she felt about working:

> Right now, I like it. I could not stay at home. I would find that would be the most crushing thing that feeling unnecessary would bring. I need to be active--need to feel that I'm doing something productive. I enjoy my day. I like my job. I enjoy the people and I enjoy doing things. I enjoy feeling useful.
>
> I really have not had anyone sort of say we'll make it easier for you. Never. In fact, and this is a direct quote from my supervisor, "Let's see how far we can go."
>
> I've always worked. I was a hospital aide while I was in grade 12. I was a typist while I was going to school, and so I'd work and go to

> school, and work and go to school. Money was not be had as far as I was concerned. The only way I could get money was by earning it. Allowances were unheard of. To give you an example, the clothing was chosen for me, and there was no makeup, definitely no makeup. The last time my mother ever clobbered me was when I was 17 years old. She really hit me a good one because I was five minutes late coming home. Then when I came to Edmonton, I mean the most I ever did with my hair was I wore it in long braids that came down to my waist. Girls didn't cut their hair. You didn't need these frivolities. But I loved my parents. But that was just the way it was.
>
> But I haven't told you about the time I was fired. Waitress. I used to work at a little restaurant called Turtle Mountain Playground. We had uniforms that said Turtle Mountain Playground written on a very prominent place on our anatomy. A group of guys came in and I was delivering soup and one of the guys said, "Hi" and grabbed me where it said playground and I said "Oops" and dumped the soup on him. And my boss called me back and said the customer is always right and that was it. Goodbye. But I can still remember him jumping up off that stupid chair. The chair went flying and he was yelling and all I could think of "scald ya bugger, scald." How did I feel? Well, it was just, oh, so what. At least I felt that I did do something. I just didn't take it.

Research Question 3 asked how women's job seeking strategies influenced their positions in the labour market. BJ was asked how she got her present position and was asked about her concepts of employment equity and job or career progression.

> This position just sort of evolved. I had more experience and higher qualifications for the most part than my male supervisors. In one of the first jobs I was doing all the assistant work, all the legwork, checking on all the legal aspects, checking through files, records, checking all the precedents, and I was "his girl." And that summed it up. In fact, I left that job because of what we would now call an assault. I found out that he went through six of "his girls" in a very short period of time but nothing was ever done about him. But I was naive. I was brought up very naive. I had no idea.
>
> But there isn't any pay equity. There really isn't. In fact, here in this department we have two females acting as deputy directors and they supervise a lot of males and they make only $70 more than the guys they supervise. And their male counterparts make much closer to the managers' salaries. The old boys' thing is alive, well, and thriving, and I think it will be for a long time. I don't know what to do about it. I don't think anybody knows what to do about it.

"Do you find that because you have been in the workforce for so long that you were able to get promoted much the same as the men were promoted?" BJ responded:

> No, very definitely not. You don't get promotions. I've had to apply outside of being asked to come with me, but it's always been to be my secretary or something, my secretary will do this, or my secretary will do that, almost as if we were servants.
>
> That's one of the things I find wrong in a lot of the clerical positions that people have. They get stuck in a position where they do it this way day in and day out. I like to see young people succeed and I'll be the first one to say to any young girl who comes into the clerical field, do something, get out of it, do something higher, think, use your head. Clerical just means "a clerk" and I'm not calling it down because we need clerical people. Some people, it's perfect for them, but others need to get ahead. If you're not afraid of hard work, then do something more.

Follow-up

BJ said she enjoyed reading the transcripts as they brought back so many memories. She realized how hard she had worked throughout the years and questioned whether she still thought hard work was the way to go. She stated how she found it quite unbelievable that so many young girls where she worked were content to be in dead end jobs even though they expected to work throughout their lives.

A Profile of Raelene

Raelene was born in Canada and is the oldest of five children. She graduated from high school and planned to enter the Faculty of Education; however, her parents were reluctant to pay her tuition as "they still had four other children at home to feed and they had to have enough money in case one of the boys wanted to go to university because they would have a family to support." So, she worked as a waitress and short-order cook to try to save enough money for her university tuition. She managed to save enough to put

herself through a one-year program at business college with the intention of being able to work full time at a better salary and thus attend university sooner in the long run.

Upon completion of her program she obtained employment with the provincial government as a clerk typist and within seven years worked her way up to a supervisory position. She then married and resigned from her position the following year because she was pregnant.

She had three children and remained out of the work force until her youngest child was ten years old. During this time, however, she worked on a contract basis out of her home typing theses and term papers.

Raelene applied for a government position but the only position available was at an entry level. She accepted it with the expectation that she would be promoted within a short time because she would now be eligible for the internal promotions and limited competitions. She stayed in this entry level position for three years until she was asked to fill a one-year supervisory position for a person who was going on sabbatical leave. She worked in this capacity for the year and was then asked to work in a supervisory capacity in another department for eight months. At the end of the eight months, she returned to her entry level position where she has spent the last six years. She said that she tries to be optimistic by telling herself that she was fortunate to survive the cutbacks and that she is at the top of the pay scale and will receive a long service increment. However, she also said that she can't help feeling that she is overworked, underpaid, and undervalued. Her marriage is unstable and she feels "trapped in a dead-end job."

Raelene has attempted to upgrade her education but is frustrated by the barriers she has encountered. She is particularly concerned about her inability to

finance any form of higher education on a full-time basis because of the cost and about the length of time it will take her to achieve her goals on a part-time basis.

Raelene's Responses to Research Questions

Raelene's response to the question "How did you get into this type of work?" was that clerical work was her second choice and education was her first choice. Her marks were not high enough for university entrance, but she feels that in part this was because she was working as a waitress and short order cook nearly full time while attending high school in an effort to save sufficient money for university tuition.

> I worked at the same place from the time I was 15 until I was 19 as a waitress and short order cook. Then I came into Edmonton and went through college and I was at work within a week.

Raelene began as a clerk-typist in an entry-level position and "worked my way right up to supervisor within seven years." She stated:

> It was a very interesting and challenging job for me because I had a chance to work my way up. I had four girls in the office and I had to coordinate their work and make sure that it was done in order of priority. I was secretary to the superintendent and the assistant superintendent. And we were affiliated with the family courts so we had all the files and we provided them for the family court so we worked hand in hand basically. Also, my job was taking dictation from probation officers and we had branch offices all over the province. So I was in contact with all those probation officers and branches throughout the province by phone and of course when they came into Edmonton.

During this time Raelene married and was forced to quit when she became pregnant. She was out of the "official" work force for about 12 years but during this time she worked out of her home typing theses. This led to her accepting a part-time position which she eventually left because of the isolation and because she had "heard from a friend" about the opening for the job which she presently holds. She has been in her present clerk I/II position for six years but has held

other positions up to a clerk IV level for approximately two years on a temporary basis as a replacement for other workers.

When asked to describe the criteria for hiring for her present position she stated that it was "just a straight typing test" and that she "had 91 words a minute with no errors."

When asked about her expectations from work and if there were some things about her present job that she did not expect, she explained that she did not expect to still be in an entry-level position when she had successfully worked at higher levels on a temporary basis. She also indicated that working conditions are important to her:

> I got that job and I worked for three years and then I did a cover-off within the building that eventually lead, well it was a temporary cover-off but at a higher level and then I came back to my job for a month and then I applied for another position that came open as a result of a university sabbatical leave by someone in administration and again it wasn't going to be long term, it was only going to be until this person came back. I knew the job wasn't mine to keep but at that point it was the coordinator's position in the registrar's office so did that for what turned out to be 8 months. And that was extremely challenging and I really enjoyed that job. But as I said, it wasn't mine to keep but it was a level IV as opposed to the level I that I'm currently in.
>
> I'm back in the level I/II and I'm no longer a supervisor and anything else that has come up at a higher level wasn't really where I wanted to work. I prefer to work with people and I really enjoy working directly with the students, and that's what I was doing in the registrar's office as well as in the office I'm in now. The high point of my job certainly isn't the clerical responsibilities.

Raelene felt that she was underemployed and found this frustrating.

> I feel very frustrated. The only way to describe it is that I feel akin to a girl Friday. And I guess it sort of has come home to me because I just had my appraisal done as I'm to have a long service increment this year. You can get it after 7 years of employment. I've been with this department eight years and six years in this job and I'm back to a clerk 1/11.
>
> Basically there is no way to reclassify me. They did try to reclassify this position and the only way I can possibly find another job that I

> would enjoy is for me to take some courses and this is what I am considering now. I've sort of spun my wheels and couldn't make a decision and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and now I've sorted out the part of the job I really enjoy and it's had some bonuses. Certainly getting to know people and the students.

To compensate she made her own challenges.

> My ambition is to get to know as many of the students every term by their first name and I've managed to do that to the point where I know 3/4 of the students by first name. It paid off because I'm also a member of Toastmasters which I really enjoy, and as a result of that I was asked to give the keynote address at the College graduation in June and I spoke to 1100 people. I knew that I had really been accepted when they introduced me and a lot of the students and some of the staff didn't know I was going to speak and when they introduced me I got such an ovation from the students that I had wait for it quieten before I could even begin to speak. It was such a thrill and so unexpected I really wasn't sure how to react. I felt like I had brought my own fan club along. So that was a real thrill. As I say there have been bonuses and also because of Toastmasters I've spoken to the Business Career classes at least 6 different classes on the topic of communication and its importance on the job as well as the benefits of belonging to a club such as Toastmasters especially if you are in the business career field. I enjoyed that because, of course, I knew a lot of the students and I felt quite relaxed and I think they could relate to me. They knew where I worked and I told them explicitly that one time I could never speak the way I do. And it was a very relaxed atmosphere and I really enjoyed it, but my real coupe was the graduation. That was a real thrill.

Although Raelene had expanded her original job description on her own initiative, she felt she was not officially recognized for her additional work and felt somewhat resentful at not being considered for a newly created position.

> My job when the students are all there is very harried. It's very stressful and at time, well, I thought I could handle everything but then a couple of times when there have been extra jobs put on me that I didn't think I could handle it last year. I managed but you get a little resentful. People have no idea how busy you are and they don't stop to think, and again it's a case of taking you for granted. I guess this is the part that really bothers me, you know you do a good job and you enjoy doing a good job, but then you start being taken for granted and little things like forgetting my anniversary date for my appraisal irritate me. I hope it went in in time but I could wind up waiting an extra month to get my increment and also being overlooked for a position that was created and not even being told that this position was being created. Whether or not I would have qualified for

> it, it would have been nice to know that I was offered an opportunity to try. But that wasn't even the case. A lot of bitterness and a lot of well not even sour grapes, but I'm pretty well stuck in this situation and I guess this is what I resent.

Research question 2 explored how early socialization patterns influence occupational choice. Raelene felt obligated to keep her opinions to herself so as to avoid confrontational situations, "a carryover from her childhood."

> So my biggest problem is to get some assertiveness and I'm speaking up more but I still get put down.

Raelene discussed problems with her husband:

> I guess I'm having problems too with working around how my husband feels about this (Raelene taking some courses) because he's virtually a do nothing person. He has no interests, no hobbies, no friends, and I'm feeling guilty because I'm on the run and he's home doing nothing. I know it's of the old school but I really have difficulty shaking the idea that if your husband is home, I should be there too. As usual I've been going along compromising all my life doing things or not doing things because he doesn't like it or he gets erratic and upset about things.
>
> Rather than create a scene you fix it so as long as he [husband] is happy and there's no hassle everything is just fine. But now I see basically that that's just allowing him to be the controller and he doesn't like it when I say my opinion or call him on something. But I'm to the point now where I don't really care because I really feel that I've lost myself trying to please him. And my inability to make a decision or my procrastination is really based on the fact that I've never been made to feel that my opinion is really worth anything.

Raelene told of how her socialization patterns also affected her work environment:

> I was doing a job to help them that really I shouldn't have had to do. But it was assigned to me by someone in authority, so of course, shut your mouth.
>
> I'm in a situation where the staff and I get along well. If I were to voice my opinion on how that other job was handled then of course I would come across as perhaps something like sour grapes and I might create a strain in the relations between the girls in the office whereas at the moment we get along well. So I keep my mouth shut.
>
> I bite my tongue a lot and don't say a lot because all it would do is ruin the atmosphere. And from what I hear we are very fortunate in

> having one of the offices where people really do get along well. But in the last couple of years I've seen things go on that I haven't liked but I'm not in a position to stir up the air. I've been fortunate in that the office has been redesigned a bit so that I'm pretty much over and away from the rest of the people in the office so that I can work on my own and don't have to get caught up in the office politics. I'm busy enough and I don't need to be bothered by it so I do a lot on my own. I react on my own.

Raelene also explained that she accepts decisions that affect her but feels she should have input into the final decision. "Another carryover from childhood, that you do not question authority and if you do, you are usually sorry about it."

> I would rather work with people than computers and they knew that, but just the same it was an area that I would have really liked to have gotten into and it's different from anything else that I've done, but I wasn't even made aware that there was a need for this kind of position. I have no problem with her getting it as long as we had been made aware that the position was open and that anyone could be considered for it, but the position wasn't even advertised. I should have been given the opportunity to apply, but I'm not in a position to make waves.

When asked how she felt about working, she blamed herself for her present position, but said "I try to make the best of things. I always have, what else can I do?"

> I think people think that, well they forget that at an entry level position, that I'm not making anywhere near the money I should be making for the number of years that I've been working. At lot of it I must say could be my own fault because I've been choosy about where I work but I really believe I would rather be working for less money at a job I enjoy than more money at a job that is totally boring.
>
> I've been putting in all these years doing the work of three people and I'm not to say that part of it isn't my own fault, and now of course the economy being what it is, my choices are even less and I'm fortunate that I still have a job that is a permanent position. That is something else. There have been jobs that have come and that really looked enticing but they were all temporary positions for maybe a year. And I don't want to risk losing a permanent position. If I work at the job for a year and then it's phased out, where am I? So this is another reason that I've held on to what I've got and I'm just thankful that I

> get a lot of enjoyment out of most of it. But the rest is rather humdrum.

When asked how her significant others felt about her working, Raelene described her husband:

> Initially he didn't like my going back to work and I went only part time, and then he was really upset when I decided to go full time. Once he got used to me being there full time, I was really upset about something and was considering quitting and then he was upset that I would do that.
>
> He's very insecure and he's especially insecure when I'm successful. His insecurities are compounded by the paranoia created by drinking, and it's very hard to live with. But I've also never liked hassle in my life, and it just seemed to be too much hassle to consider leaving.
>
> He's a controller and it's funny, you know, how friends tell you that over the years, but you think it could always be worse so you hang in there. But now that the kids are out on their own and they are having to face life and struggle, and again I'm caught between trying to get away from being a fixer and trying to devote a little more time to my interests.

Raelene stated that even though her husband was unemployed, she was still responsible for the housework.

> Well, I keep the housework up and I basically do that all myself. He's been helping a little bit insofar as doing dishes but nothing other than that. We have a garden and that's his department.

At one point Raelene received some secondhand positive feedback from a counsellor and was encouraged to look into taking some psychology courses.

> I was encouraged by one of the counsellors to follow this avenue because the head of the counselling department commented to her so she relayed it me. She wanted me to know that he was very impressed with the way I handle people and how I am so efficient and he commented that with probably a couple of psychology courses under my belt I could probably qualify as a counsellor aide. So that was something I considered following up on.

However, when she asked for formal assistance with planning new avenues she could explore she received the following advice:

> I talked to [counsellor] and I had said that I've got to do something and that I was thinking of taking a couple of psychology courses and she actually tried to talk me out of it. She said I didn't need that at this point in my life. What I need is a course that's a fun course, a human interest course because I had a good job where I was and that basically this probably wasn't a very good idea. I guess I was a little offended by that attitude. I mean I really like her as a person and I guess I was a little taken aback by the lack of encouragement. I think that people forget that I'm not making a whole lot of money.

When asked how her husband felt about her returning to school, she said:

> I haven't even mentioned that yet because I've been waffling trying to decide what to do or how to go about it.

When she finally decided to take Psychology 290 she found she would have a problem with the timetabling of the course.

> At one time I had considered Athabasca University which offers Psych 290 which is a psychology course required for counselling for women. And this was something else that was recommended to me but unfortunately it's not an evening course. It's based on a Friday and Saturday for three weeks in succession and, of course, I'm not going to get a whole day off three weeks in a row, not in my busy job because there is no one to cover for me. And by doing that I would just irritate everybody else in the office and then we would just have a conflict.
>
> Another teachers' aid suggested that maybe even I consider teaching aide. I've seen the minimum pay for a teaching aide and it starts roughly $450 higher than what I'm making a month now. It's not an horrendous amount but it is extra money as well as being recognized for something else besides just being a secretary.

Follow-up

Raelene said she really wanted to take Psychology 290 from Athabasca University but still felt it was impossible for the previously stated reasons. She admitted that she had not asked the department chair about getting time off but had made the assumption her request would be denied. She also realized that she assumed it would irritate the other workers and cause conflict in the office. She decided to approach the department chair. He responded by saying that he was glad to see she was taking the initiative to improve herself. He also stated

that he would support her application if she wanted to apply for professional development funding to help offset the costs of the course as it was directly related to her employment. He said not to worry about the time off "if it's only three Fridays." During registration she discovered she had been misinformed and the course itself was done by correspondence and she would have to attend three lab sessions, either on Fridays or Saturdays, as part of the course. Raelene is presently enrolled in the course and thoroughly enjoying it.

Profile of Sandi

Sandi worked inside the home for approximately 25 years, and during this time she did volunteer work with her children's activities and their school. She and her husband divorced and she found herself in a position where she had to support herself and her daughter. She enrolled in a postsecondary institution and took a ten-month office administration program. Her only work outside the home was a nine-day work experience component in her office administration program. Nevertheless, she found employment in her field with a large company two weeks after graduation. She now has a permanent position and has been with the company for just over two years. She received a promotion within her first year and is now in a different department doing a different and more challenging job.

Sandi's Responses to Research Questions

Sandi entered the clerical field on the advice of a friend who had completed the course two years previously and "because there was a high placement rate and it was only a ten-month course."

She also stated:

> I wanted to get into a big company where there would be room for movement and where you could further extend your studies and grow

> within that company. That's why I picked something big rather than a smaller outfit.

Sandy felt there were ample promotional opportunities within the clerical field in her company. She stated:

> I already went up one step within a year so I'm very pleased. I've taken different computer courses with them already and anything that relates to your job, they will cover that for you. If I wanted to take accounting or any other course like that, I could . . . there are so many different clerical positions within the company that definitely there is room for both growth and movement.

Although Sandy was enthusiastic about her work, she showed an element of naivete:

> Well, I started here two weeks after I finished my course, but in the course we had work experience for nine days so that definitely prepared me for what to expect in the work force.

When asked if there were some things about this type of work that she did not expect, she said:

> I don't think so. I was quite unprepared for maybe what they had to offer. For instance, with being with a big company I wasn't sure about the courses they offered or if they would encourage you to take them so I was quite pleased with that part of it. But for the work itself, no there weren't too many surprises. It was a lot of learning but certainly that was very beneficial. And what I'm doing is pretty much what I took in school.
>
> I enjoy it [work]. I would find it very hard to stay home. One thing I find about working is there is also the social aspect of it and that's quite important to me I think, also intellectual ability of some of the people and just meeting a variety of people.
>
> After being in the home for so many years raising kids, it's really nice to be out in the workforce and just enjoy other people during your lunch and during the work hours. I don't do so much after work with them but during the work hours. There are just so many nice people out there that I enjoy.

She has also found that she has more confidence.

> That made a real big difference because at first after having been out of school for so many years I was very, very unsure of myself, but after I achieved very good marks at the end and it was such a good feeling.

> I worked hard and it was good to be able to do it, very good. And actually my kids are very proud of me being able to do this. Actually, they are quite high achievers too, so they were very proud that I was able to do that.

Sandy considered her daughter her significant other and described how her daughter felt about her mother returning to school and to work.

> She found it pretty hard when I went back to school because I don't think she expected, nor did I expect the amount of homework I had. She was about 13 so she had to do a lot on her own. But she was very encouraging. She was very supportive and she was really glad that I went back to school but I think that one year while I was in school was a little bit hard on her.

> She has really enjoyed it [Sandy's working]. She likes the hours I have and she is able to reach me at any time. She hasn't minded at all. But I think with the schooling first it prepared her so much that after I got the job it was really nice. It was just a few hours out instead of constantly being involved. She's very supportive.

She also received support from her two sons.

> I also have two sons and my oldest son was going to university at the time and he was the one that really helped a lot. He came down quite a few nights and helped me with math especially. And he was very good.

Sandy received information about the program she enrolled in from a friend. However, she also attended a government-sponsored career selection program held on three consecutive evenings which she found to be of little value.

> I got it through an ad in the paper. It was held downtown in the evenings for three hours. We went and we had to write down what we wanted to do, what our goals were. And then, it was only three evenings, and then they started showing different jobs that were available out there. But there were so many and they went through it so quickly that I never really got a chance to find . . . they had books there so you could look up what these jobs were, but there was just no time. Maybe if a person took it for two whole days or something, whatever they're offering, they would get more out of it, but just a few hours in the evening I don't think it's worthwhile.

> Before I actually went to school I went to one of their [school] meetings and found out more about it and that was really beneficial. They described what the course was and what the placement rate was, where you would start for wages, so it gave you an idea. That helped

out a lot. It was held after I was accepted into the program but before actual registration.

Follow-up

Sandi is still working for the same company and thoroughly enjoys her work.

Summary

The women selected to participate in this study were purposively selected from diverse cultural backgrounds. As they told their stories, the circumstances which had an impact on their decision making and their perceptions of the choices that were available to them were strikingly similar.

While each woman's story is unique, they share a complex struggle for survival on the edge of the corporate world. Some women were recipients of government funded educational and training programs designed to assist them enter or re-enter the workforce. Because less than a high school diploma is required for entrance, these women seem destined to run on the clerical treadmill; they do not have the prerequisites for higher education, and with their low wages, they cannot afford to upgrade. Some are single mothers; they do not have the time and have even less disposable income for courses. Two of four women met the exit requirements when they began their program of study; the other two experienced so much difficulty they failed. This leads one to question the validity of the entrance requirements.

Other women had the prerequisites and intended to pursue higher education but found insurmountable barriers when they attempted to enroll. Financing was the biggest issue and several women entered the clerical workforce as a temporary measure, believing they could save enough money to enter university later. Twenty years later they felt trapped, overworked, and underpaid,

and they were still in their in clerical positions "going nowhere faster and faster" (Raelene).

Only one woman out of eight, a homemaker for 25 years, entered clerical work as her first choice and is content with her job. There may be an element of naivete; however, she has received a promotion.

Each woman's story is complex and multi-faceted, and each story needs to be valued and shared as a whole because the whole is so much greater than the facts that compose it.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of choice in the occupational selection process of mature women. Data were obtained from indepth interviews with eight women: four who were participating in training programs for office work and four employed in office occupations. A Career Aspirations Interview Guide and a demographic questionnaire were developed and used to obtain parallel data wherever possible. All four women in the training program described a critical incident which precipitated their return to school and two of the four employed women described a critical incident which precipitated their return to the workforce. Although this was not an intended part of the study, in all instances it had a profound effect on the lives of these women and is, therefore, incorporated into the analysis.

The results are presented in the following format. First, responses related to each research question are summarized in tabular format and discussed. Then the themes that emerged from the data are discussed using Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs (constructive alternativism). Kelly's fundamental postulate and his corollaries are approached from the perspective of the "self." For Kelly, "self" is integral to the total picture of the person; therefore, central to the discussion was each woman's perception of her "self" and the relationship of her "self" to other entities.

Research Question 1

What is the nature of the career aspirations of mature women?

The focus of this question was to ascertain the rationale which women gave for their choices and the degree of concurrence between these aspirations and the actions taken for career preparation. The areas explored included the circumstances that led to their current position, their educational preparation for work, their commitment to work, career focus, and expectations from work, particularly as they related to pay and promotional opportunities. Table 5.1 summarizes the reasons the women gave for entering clerical work.

Table 5.1 Summary of Reasons for Entering Clerical Work

Reasons/expectations	Students	Workers
Advised by counsellor to enter clerical field	4	2
Wanted to upgrade/acquire new skills	4	n/a
Eligible for government funding	3	2
Interim measure only	0	3
Short training period & high placement	1	4
First choice not available	4	3
Immediate financial need	3	4
Personal fulfillment	1	1
Critical incident	4	2

All four students were advised by a counsellor to enroll in a clerical program even though three of the four students had previous office/clerical experience of 5, 11, and 17 years. Three students wanted to upgrade on computer software but had to enroll in a full program for funding eligibility. Two of the three students who were receiving government funding met nearly all the exit requirements before they began their program. This raised several questions: Why did these women not explore other areas of career development? Why were they not eligible for funding as part-time learners? Why were they accepted into a program, particularly one where they were funded by tax dollars, when they met or nearly met the exit requirements?

All four workers and one student said they entered this field because of the short training period and high placement rate. Three of four workers entered as an interim measure to work and save enough money for university tuition. Even though one woman graduated from high school with honours, student loans or other forms of financing for university were not available to her at that time; however, financing for a clerical program was easily obtained.

Seven women said their first choice of occupation or program was not available to them either because of financial constraints or restricted enrollment. Only two women indicated they received any sense of personal fulfillment from their present work/school situation which lends support to the previous statement; that is, they had to settle for second or, in one case, third choice in their occupation. One woman changed her program to clerical because she did not meet the entrance requirements of the program of her first choice.

Seven women indicated they had an immediate financial need which precipitated their return either to school or the workplace.

Table 5.2 describes the participants' expectations from work.

Table 5.2 Expectations from Work/Program of Study

Reasons/expectations	Students	Workers
Did not expect such a heavy workload	4	3
Found program academically challenging	2	1
Found lack of academic challenge (boring, busy work)	2	3
Expected promotional opportunities	4	1
Realized lack of promotional opportunities	0	3
Had no expectations	2	4
Did/do not plan to stay in clerical field	0	3

Seven women commented on having a heavy workload and five women described either their work or program as "boring, busy work" and commented that it was not academically challenging. Two students and one worker found the opposite.

Only one worker felt she had promotional opportunities where she worked and expressed satisfaction with her job. She was the only worker who planned or plans to stay with her present company. All four students said they thought their certificate might give them a better chance for promotional opportunities even though all four had previous clerical experience and did not receive any promotions. Six women said they entered clerical work with no definite expectations and only three said they planned to stay in this field.

The data indicate the women in this study appear to have restricted choices, a naive concept of a career in general, and poorly defined career aspirations.

Research Question 2

How or to what extent are socialization patterns perceived by the participants to have influenced their present life situation?

This question focused on the participants' perceptions of how their socialization influenced their present life situation. That is, how did they perceive and integrate family responsibilities and work/school? How did they and their significant others feel about their work/program? Table 5.3 identifies the factors influencing occupational choice.

The literature indicates this generation of women was mainly socialized to be homemakers. However, seven women were emphatic that they preferred to work outside the home and only one said that she considered her home duties her primary responsibility. One woman said her spouse did most of the housework, but the other seven were largely responsible for all household tasks in addition to their work or school. Six women described how they felt stressed or frustrated on an ongoing basis because of the demands of work/school and housework. Six women said their significant other(s) only increased their workload although four women said their significant other was supportive. (Of these four, two women considered their children to be their significant other.) Only one woman stated that family responsibilities precluded promotional opportunities for a position that may be more demanding.

Table 5.3 Factors Influencing Occupational Choice

Summary of Responses	Student	Worker
Prefer to work outside the home	3	4
Largely responsible for household duties	3	4
Feel guilty/frustrated on ongoing basis	3	3
Significant other supportive	2	2
Significant other helps with housework	1	1
Significant other only increases workload	3	3
Family responsibilities preclude promotional opportunities that may be more demanding	3	1
Lack of high school diploma limited choices[1]	4	1
Lack of finances limited higher education	2	4
Have to work for financial reasons	3	4
Program/job is repetitive and tedious	3	2
Marks/job duties are not representative of ability	4	3
Not accurately assessed at beginning of program	4	n/a
Would like more opportunities for personal growth	2	3

[1] One worker did not graduate from high school but later took General Equivalency Diploma (GED).

All four workers and two students felt that lack of money restricted their educational opportunities which directly limited their occupational choices. The four students without a high school diploma viewed this as a serious limitation in the workplace and were concerned that they would still not have a high school

diploma when they finished their training program. Seven women stated that it was financially necessary for them to work although five of these seven women were in a double income situation.

Five women described their program/job as repetitive and tedious, and indicated they would like more challenging opportunities. However, it does not seem to have occurred to the three students that perhaps their program is indicative of what they can expect in a clerical position; that is, the work may actually be routine and monotonous.

The women in this study felt that their socialization directly affected the types of work they were permitted to enter. Seven women felt their marks/job duties were not representative of their abilities, and all four students felt they were not accurately assessed at the beginning of their programs. In addition, they felt caught in a "socialization sandwich." That is, they were expected to perform all the household tasks and provide emotional support to family members as they had been socialized to do, while at the same time function as a full-time member of the paid workforce. Not only were the women socialized to assume these roles but both the spouses and the counsellors these women encountered appeared to still have a stereotypical attitude. As well, these women readily accepted the advice from those whom they considered to be authority figures as they were socialized to do.

Five women indicated they would like more opportunities for personal growth which they described as having time to read a book or the newspaper.

Research Question 3

How have women's job seeking strategies influenced their position in the labour market?

Research question 3 focused on women's job seeking strategies and their sources of information. The areas explored included the role of peer networks, the concept of job or career progression, and the role of career counselling. Table 5.4 indicates how each student found out about the program or how each worker came to be in her present position.

Table 5.4 Sources of Information about the Program

Sources of Information	Student	Worker
Friend/relative	3	2
Counsellor	4	0
Did own research	1	1
Promoted to this position	n/a	3
Demoted to this position	n/a	1

Three of four students were originally informed of their programs by a friend or relative. Two workers were informed of job postings by friends and became the successful applicants; therefore, their responses were also included under "promoted to this position."

All four students saw a counsellor because it was part of the acceptance and registration procedures of the institutions. However, in no case did the counsellor offer any other suggestions or alternatives to clerical work.

Although the participants' present work situation was not recently influenced by a counsellor, two women were advised that this was their only option when they first entered the workforce. Another women was given discriminatory advice by a counsellor when she recently inquired about a career change, and the fourth woman attended a government sponsored information session which she did not find helpful. This supports the findings of Phillips and Phillips (1983), Callender (1987) and Peitchinis (1990). Table 5.5 identifies previous work experience of the participants.

Table 5.5 Previous Work Experience

Previous work experience	Student	Worker
Clerical work	4	3
Waitress/hospitality	0	2
Low skill labour	3	3
Commissioned sales	0	1
Supervisor	0	2
No previous work experience	0	1

All four students who were enrolled in the clerical program had previous clerical work experience. Three of the workers had previous clerical experience before they accepted their present position.

Two workers but no students had previous experience in the hospitality industry, although six women had participated in jobs which required little skill.

One worker had experience in commissioned sales and two workers had held supervisory positions. Only one woman who had been a homemaker for 25 years had no previous work experience. The women in this study appeared to have no proactive job search strategies and readily accepted advice from friends or authority figures.

Themes

The eight women in this study entered the clerical workforce or a clerical/secretarial program in an attempt to find a solution to a personal problem. Personal problems, particularly those that exist in constructs defining "the self," may be understood as person-situation interactions within a limited, specifiable range of situations (Fisher, 1989). For these eight women, their range of choice in occupational selection was a limited menu of stereotypical alternatives presented to them by authority figures. These interactions are interpreted through the theme "Self → Expert Other."

Within each woman's story was woven the intricacies of her culture, the hidden rules by which she felt compelled to abide, the rules that were implanted by socialization. For the eight women these rules formed her self/world relationship, her "Self → Cultural Controls."

The regulations employed and enforced by institutions played a critical role in determining the availability of choice in occupational selection for these women. The federal government through Canada Employment, the provincial government through social services and the Student Finance Board, and the colleges, technical institutes and universities have screening devices that are often inappropriate for mature women. External factors such as entrance tests,

availability of space, purchased seats, funding restrictions, and cost of courses directly influenced or restricted the options for these women. The theme "Self → Institutes" explores these relationships.

Each woman had to deny some aspects of her "self" to accommodate external situations. Illness, death, divorce, and/or poverty forced these women to make decisions that had lifetime implications. Their choices at these critical times reflect what they saw as the best or only alternative available to them. Now they are attempting to compensate for their earlier choices that offered little personal growth. This theme is the "Denied Self → Fulfillment."

All eight women assumed their primary role would be that of caregiver; they would marry, have children, and serve as support for their husbands. They expected to be dependent. However, a critical incident caused each woman to re-evaluate her current situation and re-define her role. This is discussed as "Dependent Self → Independence."

Bannister (1983) described the "matrix of self" in the context of Kelly's (1955) fundamental postulate, *a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he or she anticipates events:*

> To anticipate the events of our own behaviour, we use core role constructs, that is, those constructs by which we centrally define ourselves and govern the maintenance of self.
>
> It is our anticipation in terms of the implications of these core role constructs (which may or may not be verbalized) that, when successful, enables us to foresee/guide our behaviour or, when failing, leaves us surprised and invalidated by our own actions. (p. 381)

The five themes that emerged from the data are expressed as follows:

Self → Expert Other
Self → Cultural Controls
Self → Institutes
Denied Self → Fulfillment and Growth
Dependent Self → Independence

Self → Expert Other

When defining the personal construction of one's role, a person finds that the constructs formed operate as rigorous controls upon behaviour. This behaviour in relation to other people is particularly affected (Kelly, 1955).

As a person construes other people, she/he formulates the construction system which governs her/his own behaviour. As the women in this study gained experience in interpreting the constructs of their perceptions of the various roles of the "expert other," usually that of a counsellor, and re-evaluated their positions within this context, the six women who acted on the advice of a counsellor have questioned the validity of their original construct.

All four women who were students felt they were not assessed properly at the beginning of their programs, yet they did not question the accuracy of the placement tests at that time. They accepted without question the advice of someone perceived as an authority and also accepted without question the results of placement tests written when they were nervous and frightened. Sharalyn accepted the counsellor's assessment of her "little bit of typing experience." In fact, typing had been an important component of her job for 17 years and her typing was fast and accurate.

Another participant, Janice, had been recently laid off after working full time for 11 years in the secretarial/clerical field. She readily accepted the advice of a counsellor to enroll in a program of study that nearly duplicated her role in the workplace for the previous 11 years. In addition, it appears that she made all the necessary preliminary arrangements for her program and still felt that taking this course would expand her employment opportunities.

It does not appear to have occurred to either Janice or the counsellor for her to simply take a course in word processing or computer applications. Instead, she enrolled in a full-time program of study that does not appear to have much possibility for expanding her options upon completion.

Kelly (1955) indicated that situations such as those Sharalyn and Janice experienced, may occur when a person is confronted with a changing scene but has no guide to carry her through the transition. Previously, Sharalyn and Janice accepted advice from those in authority and did not question the information. Now that they are questioning the validity of this advice, they have no guide from their previous experiences to assist them with administrative procedures to review their situations nor any plans for alternative actions. In other words, they simply do not know how to remedy their present situation. Although Sharalyn and Janice had radically different backgrounds, they both now find themselves in similar vocational positions.

BJ graduated from high school with honours and was advised to enter a secretarial program when she inquired about university entrance to engineering. She believed her clerical work to be an interim measure until she was able to save enough money to enter university to pursue her goal. Her father refused to finance her education as "he did not believe in women going to university," and when the counsellor supported BJ's father's belief, it invalidated hers.

According to Kelly (1955) a vocation can be looked upon as a system of ready-made constructs and as a system of validations. If a vocation represents a certain array of experiences or, in other words, a set of construed events, then it can be seen how vocational choice exercises a selective effect upon experience. Consequently, a person's job, work, occupation, or vocation represents an area of

experience which lends itself to expansion but at the same time does not usually overtax a person's tolerance of ambiguity or the unknown. In other words, a person is more likely to choose from or consider a vocational area that is familiar. Therefore, one's conceptualization of oneself and one's role is an important factor in the choice and maintenance of an occupational identification.

Raelene and Colleen also took clerical positions as an interim measure to save for university tuition. Unlike BJ, though, they were not directly advised by a counsellor but both saw this as their only option. Also, Raelene and Colleen both left the workplace for approximately five years longer than BJ. All three left to meet family obligations, all returned for financial reasons, and all three returned in a clerical capacity.

Within the past two years, both Raelene and Colleen met with counsellors to discuss the possibilities of pursuing another career. The first counsellor Raelene saw openly discouraged her efforts and the second counsellor suggested a modified version of her goal, that is, she take "a few courses" and become a counsellor's aide or a teacher's aide instead of becoming a counsellor or teacher. Colleen applied to and was accepted into computer programming. However, she was rejected for a student loan because she had a job. When she saw a counsellor about her dilemma, he was unable to suggest any alternatives; consequently, Colleen remained in her clerical position.

A person's construct system is always in the process of change, but some changes are more disturbing than others. Kelly described "feelings" or emotions in terms of transitions in personal construct systems. He said that almost any experience where a person's basic assumptions are questioned can be called a threat and threats often lead to anxiety. Button (1985) defined anxiety as the

recognition that the events with which one is confronted lie outside the range of convenience of one's construct system. That is, when we fail to make sense of what happens we may experience anxiety which often leads to feelings of guilt.

For mature women, returning to school is often an emotional experience. Most women of this generation were socialized to accept people in "authority roles" as "the expert other" and not question the decision-making process. If they had difficulty meeting the expectations others had set for them, they felt threatened and consequently experienced anxiety and guilt.

Kelly (1955) explained in his choice corollary that persons do what they see as appropriate to their nature. Thus, persons most often choose that which makes the most sense in a particular context. In the case of these women, all but one were unable to pursue their first choice because of a lack of money; therefore, they pursued the only option they saw as available to them. The "expert other" did not offer any other viable alternatives and they did not question whether any were available; they simply accepted recommendations from an authority figure. The one student who chose a clerical program as her first choice acted on the advice of a friend who had recently completed the program and who had little experience in the work place. This corollary refers to making choices through which one can anticipate elaboration or extension of one's constructs. However, persons are sometimes mistaken in their anticipation and consequently experience confusion or frustration as seems to have occurred with all but one of these women.

Self → Cultural Controls

Kelly (1979) defined culture as "social inheritance . . . the sum and total of things human" (p. 4). Personal construct theory understands cultural similarities

in terms of personal outlook and in terms of what the individual anticipates others will do and, in turn, what she/he thinks others are expecting. By examining the situations of the participants from their cultural backgrounds, and through their stories having a glimpse into their experiential world, what is observed is likely to make more sense to those outside that particular culture.

For instance, Jennifer, with her strong Irish Catholic background, left school at age 15 at her father's insistence to care for her sick mother and her five brothers. Although she had some office experience as a keypunch operator before her marriage, she had not worked outside the home for nearly twenty years. Her first attempt to re-enter the workplace was her decision to upgrade her education. She found this experience to be extremely frustrating and also found that she suffered from acute test anxiety. Jennifer described herself as "something of a perfectionist" and was "quite terrified of actually going to work" as she dreaded having to take the standard typing test that is usually given to job applicants in the secretarial field.

Kelly (1955) stated that a person anticipates events by construing their replications, and Jennifer's negative experiences created anxiety to the degree that she decided to resume her role as full-time homemaker where she felt comfortable and was able to maintain the high standard that she demanded of herself. Also, she received immediate positive feedback for her efforts.

In Sharalyn's culture the women are considered subservient. Her culture emphasizes a traditional role for women as the primary caregiver, and she has become accustomed to placing the needs of others before herself. She said that women were responsible for "the house and children and taking care of the men, and you just did what you had to do. You didn't question what he said." Men

are authority figures in Sharalyn's culture so she did not question the counsellor's advice to enter a program where she nearly met the exit requirements. Nor did she question her present workload or expect her unemployed husband or his sons to help with the household tasks.

Although Sharalyn felt exhausted and had an unemployed husband with two teenagers who were home all day, she had unquestioningly assumed the traditional role of homemaker along with her full-time studies. This behavioral pattern can be explained through core constructs.

Core constructs are those which govern a person's maintenance processes; that is, those by which identity and existence are maintained. Therefore, core constructs are directly relevant to the notion of one's "self." As a result, some people place enormous restrictions on themselves for the sake of preserving consistency (Button, 1985). In Sharalyn's situation, this appears to be the case. Although a person's construct system is always in some form of transition, some changes may be more threatening than others. Should Sharalyn choose to give up or reject her cultural role, the ensuing anxiety she may experience may be just as difficult to cope with as her present workload.

Colleen was in an abusive relationship for eighteen years before she separated from her husband. In her culture, marriage is a lifelong commitment, so a separation was a rejection of a part of her culture. With her separation, she also lost part of an extended family and her support system. When she perhaps needed a support system for her difficult personal times, she found:

> There is really no one to talk to who understands my situation. People think it's good that I'm free of him, but now I'm so broke and the other women's husbands don't want them to mix with me because I'm a troublemaker.

Although she had a variety of work experiences, at first she was only able to obtain a low level job through a government placement program. Eventually she was able to upgrade to her present clerical position. Without her husband's income, Colleen found herself trapped financially; she feared that soon she would not be able to meet her payments. She was somewhat bitter towards her culture that denied her an education and that she felt left her powerless to maintain a decent lifestyle in spite of her many years of hard work.

Both BJ and Raelene had firm career aspirations at one time. They both worked part-time while attending high school to save for university tuition as neither of their parents believed in girls attending university. "My parents were from the Old Country. Girls didn't do things like go to university." . . . "My job was to look after my man and have his children." Both BJ and Raelene originally obtained clerical positions after high school as an interim measure until they were able to pursue their goals. However, both are now still in clerical positions.

This apparent lack of career progression can be explained through Kelly's CPC Learning Cycle (circumspection, preemption, control). Circumspection can be compared to "brainstorming" where a person opens up to a variety of suggestions, then limits or rejects them (preemption), and finally thinks through or follows through with the validation process. In BJ's and Raelene's situation, their "brainstorming" or circumspection only elicited one process they could see as viable (preemption): take a secretarial program as an interim measure. At this stage they followed through with their choice which constituted the validation process. However, in the next stage as they thought through the process, they appeared to reject all the alternatives that they saw as available to them. Thus,

they continue in circular fashion, to brainstorm and then reject the possibilities.

Self → Institutions

Institutions act as means of control in society. Kelly (1955) defined control as "a two-way street . . . as a pathway of movement that provides a person with a dichotomous choice" (p. 89). However, the choices that are available to a person within a construct dimension leave that person only free to decide what it is that will give greater opportunity for further definition and elaboration of one's system. The women in this study did not have freedom of choice; they had freedom to select from a limited menu of options those which would allow them to expand or further define their construct system.

For all four students, their first choice of programs was not available to them, and they were under pressure to make a decision. When a person must make a decision she/he is confronted with a series of dichotomous choices, and each choice is channelled by a construct. At this point the person must either reconstrue, that is, construct new paths into an area that was not previously accessible or revert to the familiar. When a person is under pressure she/he is not likely to develop new channels, but will instead tend to reverse along the dimensional lines which have already been established (Kelly, 1955). This may explain in part why three of the four students in this study who had previous office/clerical experience of 5, 11, and 17 years entered the clerical program, especially since two of these three met nearly all the exit requirements. All four students indicated that they had no choice regarding curriculum. Furthermore, three of four indicated that the program was not academically challenging.

Three of the four students only wanted to upgrade on computer software, but they had to enroll in a full program for funding eligibility. Two of the three

students who were receiving government funding met nearly all the exit requirements before they began their program. In contrast, one student found the program difficult. "Sometimes I don't feel like I know very much. There's so much to know. I find the program sort of hard" (Denise). This leads one to question the validity of entrance requirements, screening devices such as placement tests, and the rules governing funding.

How a person interprets or forms constructs varies as she/he successively construes the replication of events. Three of the four students questioned the validity of their original constructs: that the institution had policies which reflected the needs of the students and that the placement tests were an accurate indicator of a person's academic ability. As well, Janice, Jennifer, and Sharalyn were all apprehensive that they might not be able to obtain employment upon completion of their program. They aspired to better themselves and felt that education was the answer to gainful employment. Their anxiety could be attributed in part to the non-validation of their construct system (that more education will provide the opportunity for a better paying job). They had a firm commitment to their program and made great personal sacrifices to upgrade themselves. If a person has made only a vague or incidental commitment, only a little anxiety is experienced when a construct appears to be invalidated.

Jennifer's apparent lack of anxiety may be attributed to three factors: her husband had a high income so money was not a problem, she had made only a vague or incidental commitment to her program stating that she would be satisfied with something where she could be useful, or her anxiety and fear of failure may be so strong that she has chosen not to face the possibility that she could be unsuccessful in the workplace.

Three of four workers felt that their job duties were not representative of their abilities. This was particularly problematic for Raelene who, because of cutbacks, was now in the same category as she was eight years ago.

Kelly (1955) said that occasionally one sees in a vocational choice an attempt to "encapsulate the area of activity which is necessary for the earning of one's livelihood. Encapsulation cuts down the job's interference with the areas of one's real spontaneous interests" (p. 136, Vol. II). Kelly further stated that this was a difficult pose to maintain and eventually one will find ways to personalize the job. Raelene did this by making her own challenges. She tried to learn the names of all the students in her department, she spoke about her work to the secretarial classes, and she joined Toastmasters and held an executive position. BJ liked to teach the on-site computer courses, although she received no extra remuneration and often had to take the course first at her own expense.

Sandi had a more positive experience within the institutions. She entered the clerical field as her first choice of occupations and has been in the workforce for two years. She chose to enter the clerical field because there was a high placement rate after a short course. She worked for a large corporation and received two promotions since she began. She found her work interesting and challenging, and she enjoyed the social and intellectual aspects of her job.

Denied Self → Fulfillment

This theme is discussed within Kelly's (1955) structural interpretation of experience. Kelly stressed that the raw events of the past have of themselves not necessarily caused the individual to become the person that she/he is, but it is the construing of these events that makes them become personal experience. First, Kelly stated that the person's recollections are often factual material out of which

she has had to make some kind of sense at some time in her life. Second, these events reveal something of what the person's construction system was in order to account for behaving the way she did. This suggests the kind of rationalization and behaviour to which she may have recourse if her life situation becomes invalid or unpredictive. Third, the person's construction system indicates the kinds of social expectancies which surround her/him, and consequently, the kinds of validators with which the construct system is checked.

In Jennifer's case, she had to leave school early to care for other family members. She believed the quality of her education was also jeopardized by the limited financial resources of her particular school district. For example, they had no science equipment and most texts had pages missing. This severely restricted Jennifer's career choices as she could select only from jobs that required little education. However, after attending college to upgrade, Jennifer found that she preferred to work within the home and be financially dependent upon her husband. Jennifer's construct system confirmed that she was needed in her home by her family, just as she had been when she was young.

Sharalyn's early life position was similar to Jennifer's. Her career aspirations were affected by the sudden death of her parents, and she accepted the only alternative that appeared to be available to her; she quit school and went to work to help support her nine younger brothers and sisters. However, unlike Jennifer, Sharalyn's husband died and she was forced to support herself. She then found that she had limited career options. As well, she had serious financial problems and at one point worked two part-time jobs in addition to attending school full time. Sharalyn wanted to be a nurse, but now she just wants a job that will give her a pay cheque. Her financial problems and her

workload at home and school had left her exhausted; Sharalyn was trying to survive. In the past she accomplished her goals by hard work and determination; however, this time she was apprehensive about finding a job. Because of current economic conditions, she questioned the validity of her construct, that hard work and determination would be sufficient for her to get a job. In turn, this construing increased her anxiety level.

The concept of career, job satisfaction and self-fulfillment seemed quite foreign to both Janice and Denise. They both worked simply because they needed money to support themselves and a child.

All four students were reacting to the social expectancies of their generation--for Jennifer, Sharalyn and Denise, women in the family were the primary care givers, and for Janice, one immediately got married if you became pregnant. All four of these women put the needs of others before their own and almost seemed oblivious to the fact that they might consider themselves in the decision-making process.

All four women who were working had a high school diploma. Three women graduated from high school with university entrance (one with honours) and one later took the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). The three women with university entrance had very clearly defined career aspirations: two planned to enter education, one planned to enter engineering. All three were unable to proceed with their education because they lacked financing so they took a secretarial training program as an interim measure. Colleen and BJ left the workforce only briefly while their children were born which was against the social expectancies of that era. Raelene was absent until her youngest child began school and Sandi returned to school after 25 years and began work only two

years ago. Only Sandi expressed satisfaction with clerical work. The other three felt they had been denied pay and promotional opportunities as well as recognition for their efforts.

Each woman in this study viewed her "self" in relation to the expectations of others in her choices related to career decisions. Consequently, their career aspirations were limited to the options they saw as available to them.

Not one of the four students was able to enter her first choice of programs; subsequently, each entered training to work in an occupational area which only moderately appealed to her in the first place. All four of the women who were employed trained in clerical work because of the short training period and the high placement rate, but only one woman intended to make this her career.

All four students were restricted by the number of options they perceived were available to them. Also, they did not have the prerequisites to enter higher education without significant upgrading in academic subjects.

Dependent Self → Independence

Kelly (1969) viewed dependency as a form of security which all people require in "different degrees at different times in different forms in different relationships" (p. 283). In childhood each person establishes a dependency with his or her parents or parent substitute for both physical and emotional needs. Thus the parent becomes the validator for the child's construct system. As a child becomes older she or he is able to gradually establish and validate a more independent pattern of activity. However, in Jennifer's and Sharalyn's circumstances, they both assumed the role of mother/caregiver before they were able to establish and validate their own constructs. Denise left home at an early age because there was not enough room for her following the birth of another

sibling. Although she was "independent" she did not appear to have an emotional bond with anyone as mother/family substitute and appears to have had a need for her construct system to be validated. Her experience had been one in which she drifted from one low paying job to another. Every few years she returned home to be with her family for a little while.

Kelly (1955) felt that society had a wrong view of dependency and did not do enough to ensure that it was allocated wisely.

Both Jennifer and Sharalyn were dependent upon their husbands to provide for them. After Jennifer married she stayed home and assumed sole responsibility for running the household and for the care of her two children. When she eventually "decided to do something for herself" and returned to school, she added school responsibilities to her other tasks although she said her husband was supportive as long as it didn't interfere with what he considered her primary responsibilities.

It appears that Jennifer weighed the advantages and disadvantages of seeking employment and admitted to being "quite terrified of actually going to work." She realized that she would never be able to maintain the high standard of housework that was expected of her and work outside the home as well, so she chose to remain dependent in the relationship. But by making this choice, she achieved a degree of independence for herself. She could fulfill her household responsibilities and take time to volunteer for activities which she enjoyed. Her ability to type and her renewed self-confidence gave her more choice in the volunteer workforce.

Sharalyn continued to work for 17 years after she married as she did not have any children. She said that her husband provided the primary income so

her contribution was not particularly important. However, after the unexpected death of her husband, she found her job was not nearly enough to support her. At the suggestion of her brothers and sisters she moved to Canada and began another very difficult period in her life. She was extremely apprehensive about returning to school full time but she saw this as her only means to achieve independence. Sharalyn's first choice was nursing. "I suggested nursing and he (counsellor) said secretarial, but he didn't suggest anything else." Sharalyn appeared to have depended on a counsellor to recommend an appropriate program for her based on the results of a placement test that she wrote "when she was terrified."

Janice had just over 13 years of clerical experience and she chose to enter a secretarial program because "I don't really know anything else." Although she had worked nearly all her adult life and was the sole support for her son and herself for six years, she did not see herself as ever being the primary wage earner. She hoped that her husband would always have this role even though she stated that financially she would have to work. When asked specifically if pay and promotional opportunities were important to her, she said that they definitely were. However, when queried about the type of work that would give her these opportunities, she indicated that she had given the matter very little thought. Janice's concept of job or career progression appeared to be somewhat naive and she readily accepted the advice of a counsellor to enrol in a program of study that nearly duplicated her role in the workplace for the past eleven years.

Denise worked sporadically and held a variety of low-paying jobs for the past 20 years. When her son was two years old (he is now five), she decided to

upgrade her education to improve her lifestyle as she realized the degree to which her son was dependent upon her. Her first choice was the nursing assistant program, but she found she didn't like science so changed her career goal to secretarial. She found the program difficult and appeared to have little concept of a career. "I know that it pays higher to be a secretary than it is being a cashier and I just need a job that pays more."

Kelly (1955) suggested that people in general tend to place greater value on the alternatives in their construct system which seem to offer them a clearer sight of the things they know. Both Janice and Denise had very limited experiences from which to elaborate their bases for decision making. Their choices were governed by their awareness of other possibilities involved which in their cases were few. Kelly argued that experience refers to the constructions and revisions of constructions placed upon events rather than to the repeated confrontation with events which are always viewed the same way. Consequently if a person does not modify the constructions as a result of the outcomes of predictions, he or she gains no new experience; it is the same experience repeated. This appears to have been the case with Denise.

Although Colleen worked outside the home for most of her married life, her husband controlled the finances and kept Colleen in a dependency relationship. After her divorce Colleen realized she had changed one type of dependency for another; she was no longer dependent upon her husband for finances, but she now perceived herself to be lonely, poor, and powerless to upgrade herself.

BJ was kept dependent by her parents throughout her childhood and teen years largely by controlling her access to money. She had an independent spirit and as soon as she was able, she came to the city to enroll in university. Her

parents expected that she would return home within a few days as they were aware she did not have sufficient funds either to cover university tuition or support herself. Instead, she enroled in a secretarial program. Kelly (1955) explained this dependent/independent behaviour in terms of aggression--the active elaboration of one's perceptual field. By Kelly's definition, an aggressive person is actively doing things, always challenging herself/himself in situations where choices and actions are required. BJ did not conform to the norms of her era; she continued to work throughout her pregnancies; she worked outside the home when her children were young; she was, at times, the primary wage earner.

Raelene's childhood was similar to BJ's. She, too, wanted to attend university. She worked throughout high school to earn tuition, took a secretarial course as an interim measure, and was still employed in a clerical capacity. Whereas BJ received several promotions, Raelene's positions were subjected to severe budget cuts and she now found herself is back in an entry level position. Her husband was unemployed so Raelene was the primary wage earner. Both Raelene and BJ believed in the work ethic: if you worked hard you were rewarded. However, this construct was invalidated by the present economic conditions. In addition, Raelene's present struggle with her failing marriage was causing her anxiety. Kelly said that within limits, a person may be particularly aggressive in the area of anxiety. In Raelene's case it was both her job and marriage. Raelene set up a series of choices and was trying to select alternatives from among them. She tested constructs which might fit and abandoned them if they did not appear relevant. Because other family members were now fully dependent upon her income, she had even fewer choices from which to select. Also, her efforts to upgrade her work position were severely restricted as she felt

she could not jeopardize her permanent position for a higher paying but temporary one.

Summary

The first research question explored the nature of the career aspirations of mature women who were in clerical positions or in a training program for entry into this field. The data indicate that the women in this study appear to have restricted choices and poorly defined career aspirations in general.

The second research question sought to explain how or to what extent socialization patterns were perceived by the participants to have influenced their present life situation. Although these women were socialized to be homemakers, seven of the eight preferred to work outside the home but were still largely responsible for all household tasks. All women felt that their socialization directly affected the types of work they were permitted to enter and six women felt that lack of money restricted their educational opportunities which directly limited their occupational choices.

The third research question explored job seeking strategies. The women in this study appeared to have no proactive job search strategies and readily accepted advice from friends or authority figures.

Five themes that emerged from the data were discussed using Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs and approached from the perspective of the "self." The "self" was interpreted through the relationships established by each woman and the expert other, cultural controls, institutions, denial/fulfilment, and dependence.

CHAPTER 6

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter presents a summary of the study, findings and conclusions, implications and recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

Summary of the Study

This descriptive study explored the perceptions of choice in the occupational selection process of mature women. The data analysis was based on the four-stage method of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and Kelly's (1955) theory of personal constructs provided the theoretical foundation.

The study was undertaken as an attempt to understand why women are entering the workplace in record numbers in an occupational cluster that clearly has limited opportunities for pay and promotion. The implications for this research are twofold: to provide insight into critical aspects of educational practice and career counselling, and to provide insight into the realities of the workplace as it exists for mature women who are employed in clerical occupations.

Three primary research questions guided this study. The first question asked: "What is the nature of the career aspirations of mature women?" and focused on the rationale which women gave for their choice. It explored the degree of concurrence between career aspirations and actions taken for career preparation. The second question asked: "How or to what extent are socialization patterns perceived by the participants to have influenced their present life situation?" and explored this influence on the participants' perceptions of work and the factors they saw as influencing their occupational

choice. The third question asked: "How have women's job seeking strategies influenced their position in the labour market?" and focused on women's sources of information.

The study was delimited to women between the ages of 35 and 45 who were employed in office occupations or who were attending a postsecondary institution to receive training for an office occupation. An attempt was made to include women who would represent as wide a range of experiences and individual differences as possible to lend breadth and depth to the data.

The data gathered from interview sessions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The concepts that were identified from each transcript were input into the computer and counted to determine their frequency. A profile was also developed for each participant. These were presented to the participant at the beginning of the second interview for verification and/or elaboration. In the third level of analysis similar categories from all the transcripts were compared and reduced to five conceptual categories. The data were then checked for their fit into the overall framework. This phase was written concurrently with parts three and four of the literature review.

Findings and Conclusions

The data indicated that the women in this study reflected feminist concerns regarding career development. Their range of career choice was a limited menu of stereotypical alternatives. External factors such as institutional policies, screening devices, entrance tests, availability of space, funding restrictions, time, and cost of courses also limited choices. These women preferred to work outside the home but were still largely responsible for all household tasks; consequently,

they felt stressed and frustrated on an ongoing basis because of the demands of work/school and housework.

The first research question explored the degree of concurrence between career aspirations and actions taken for career preparation. Seven women said their first choice of occupation or program was not available to them either because of financial constraints or restricted enrollment. All four students were advised by a counsellor to enroll in a clerical program even though three of the four students had previous office experience of 5, 11, and 17 years. Two of the three students who were receiving government funding met nearly all the exit requirements before they began their program. This raised several questions: Why did these women not explore other areas of career development? Why did they not insist on having their first choice of occupation or program? Why were they eligible for funding to attend a full-time program for which they already met nearly all the exit requirements? Only one person felt she had promotional opportunities at her place of employment; seven women commented on having a heavy workload, and five described either their work or program as "boring, busy work."

The second research question focused on the participants' perceptions of how their socialization influenced their present life situation. All the women felt that their socialization directly affected the type of work they were permitted to enter, and six felt that lack of money restricted their educational opportunities which directly limited their occupational choices. Seven women felt either their marks or job duties were not representative of their abilities, and all four students felt they were not accurately assessed at the beginning of their program. Seven participants said they were expected to perform most or all of the

household tasks while at the same time function as a full-time member of the paid workforce. Six women described how they felt stressed or frustrated on an ongoing basis because of the demands of work, school and housework.

The third research question focused on women's job seeking strategies and their sources of information. They appeared to have no proactive job search strategies and readily accepted "advice" from friends or authority figures. All four students saw a counsellor because it was part of the acceptance procedures of the institutions. However, even though three had 5, 11, and 17 years of clerical experience, they said the counsellor did not offer any other suggestions or alternatives to clerical work.

Kelly's theory of personal constructs provided the theoretical foundation for this study. The themes that emerged from the data were discussed within this context in an attempt to offer an explanation for these phenomena. For the eight women in this study, their range of choice in occupational selection was a limited menu of stereotypical alternatives presented to them by authority figures. These interactions were interpreted through the theme "Self → Expert Other." Within each woman's story was woven the intricacies of her culture, the hidden rules by which she felt compelled to abide, the rules that were implanted by socialization. For each of the eight women these rules formed her self/world relationship, her "Self → Cultural Controls."

The regulations employed and enforced by institutions played a critical role in determining the availability of choice in the occupational selection for these women. The federal government through Canada Employment, the provincial government through social services and the Student Finance Board, and the colleges, technical institutes and universities have screening devices that are often

inappropriate for mature women. External factors such as entrance tests, availability of space, purchased seats, funding restrictions, cost of courses, and the intimidating nature of the institutions directly influenced or restricted the options for these women. The theme "Self → Institutes" explored these relationships.

Each woman had to deny some aspects of her "self" to accommodate external situations. Illness, death, divorce, and/or poverty forced these women to make decisions that had lifetime implications. Their choices at these critical times reflected what they saw as the best or only alternative available to them. Now they are attempting to compensate for their earlier choices that offered little personal growth. This theme became the "Denied Self → Fulfillment."

All eight women assumed their primary role would be that of caregiver; they would marry, have children, and serve as support for their husbands. They expected to be dependent. However, a critical incident caused each woman to re-evaluate her current situation and re-define her role. This was discussed as "Dependent Self → Independence."

Implications and Recommendations

This research is descriptive; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to other groups of women.

The value of this research lies in the identification of certain aspects of training programs that require further attention and certain aspects of standard policies that need to be addressed to accommodate the needs of women. These areas of concern have direct implications for adult education.

The most startling aspect of this study relates to the quality of the career counselling these women received. While it is not my intent to criticize the work of counsellors who perform a valuable service for those people contemplating

career changes, re-entry to the workplace, or returning to school, this study, nevertheless, found that career counselling played a significant role in the decision-making processes and the alternative career choices that were available to the participants. Underlying these choices were the limitations growing out of the participants' lack of education and the restrictions of various funding agencies. Perhaps most problematic was the lack of voice the women appeared to have in their own destiny. In this area, counsellors may be instrumental in raising the career aspirations of women who are bound by their socialization. Counsellors also need to be sensitive to the workload and the balancing of school and home responsibilities faced by many of these women. Although the counsellors were available in all the institutions for one-on-one counselling, the participants did not take advantage of this service. Perhaps counselling could be scheduled on a regular basis throughout the program and assertiveness training could be incorporated into the programs that are female dominated.

Training programs. For the students enrolled in full-time studies, the following suggestions are offered to improve the effectiveness of training programs:

1. Pre-registration counselling should present options and alternatives that include occupations which offer an aspect of greater financial security, and pay and promotional opportunities.

2. Three of the four students were concerned that they would complete their program but still not have a high school diploma. As this is an initial screening factor for basic entry-level clerical positions, training programs of this nature must include academic courses which give participants a high school diploma in addition to their specialized training.

3. Funding agencies must consider long-term implications rather than immediate short-term solutions when funding programs.

3. Student placement based on entrance test scores needs to be addressed. Towards the end of their programs, all four students questioned the accuracy of these tests. Three students thought they had higher ability than they were initially given credit for (this was verified by their marks and comments from their teachers) and one student felt overwhelmed by the program and was asked to withdraw as she failed two compulsory courses. One teacher commented that the broad range of ability in a single class made it difficult for students without previous typing courses.

4. Programs must consider variable rates of learning. Of the four institutions discussed in this study, not one had provisions for independent learning in the daytime programs. All programs had slightly different curricula, but the approach was basically the same; all students progressed through their programs which consisted of "blocks" or "terms" within the same designated time frame. Those who could not keep up were asked to withdraw.

5. Flexibility in evaluation must be incorporated into the programs. In the students' programs, when a student was absent for any reason, all assignments had to be completed within a specified time of her return as evaluation was formative. The women in this study consistently described their assignments as repetitious and unchallenging; therefore, in certain situations other forms of evaluation could be structured when unavoidable absences occur.

6. Flexibility and choice of timetabling is necessary to accommodate the multi-dimensional lives of women.

7. As adults come to these programs with a wide variety of experience and academic qualifications, advanced standing in all subject areas must be given consideration.

8. Programs for clerical and office work are marketed aggressively by some institutions and acceptance is based upon numbers of applicants. Academic qualifications must be the primary consideration for acceptance.

9. Emphasis must be placed on education rather than training so that students have the prerequisites to continue upgrading their qualifications.

Accessibility of programs. The following recommendations are suggested to improve the accessibility of adult education courses and programs for women who are working full-time in non-professional occupations.

1. The cost of individual courses is a major deterrent. The cost of the course itself, texts, parking, and babysitting expenses make it unaffordable as the majority of women in clerical positions have very little discretionary funding. A standard form of subsidization based on income should be available for courses/programs which upgrade a person's qualifications.

2. Many credit courses are offered, but most run for three hours, two evenings a week for a term. Because of the multi-dimensional aspects of women's lives, they often cannot afford the time. Perhaps some credit courses could be offered once a week over a period of two terms, on weekends or at other times. Adult educators should consider offering credit courses at the place of employment.

3. Funding sources are readily available for full-time short courses/programs and in some cases for academic upgrading, but student loans, scholarships, and bursaries are extremely difficult to obtain, particularly if a person wishes to leave a paid position to return to full-time study. The proponents of adult education

must pressure funding sources to make monies available for people in these circumstances.

4. An alternate system for determining scholarship and bursary recipients must be devised. Many women who are high academic achievers are often not able to devote time to study because of family responsibilities; consequently, their marks are not indicative of their ability and they are not considered for scholarships.

5. More appropriate placement evaluations than the placement tests presently used should be developed.

Suggestions for Further Research

The data generated by this study present several areas that warrant further research.

1. A similar study with a larger number of participants involved in clerical work to expand the data base.

2. A similar study without the age restriction. Do younger women encounter similar circumstances?

3. Longitudinal studies of participants in training programs for clerical occupations.

4. A study of women who have been promoted from clerical positions into management positions.

Research on women and work focuses mainly on the conflict between child-rearing and paid employment. Research on office work focuses on technology. Although there is a growing literature on re-entry workers, it focuses on women who are returning in a professional capacity. The mature female clerical worker

has received scant attention. However, it is critical that this segment of the population receive more attention.

Women presently constitute nearly half the labour force. Yet they represent the majority of the population over 65 years old and represent approximately 70% of the elderly living below the low income cutoff (poverty line). The labour market position of women from midlife onward is crucial in determining the financial independence of these women in retirement. A great deal of research has focused on the pay differential of men and women, but the fact remains that despite equity legislation women still only receive a percentage of men's income for similar, or in some cases, the same work. As women presently account for 90% of the participants in training for office occupations, and if technological change eliminates many clerical jobs as is commonly predicted, women's employment opportunities in this field may be even further reduced. This emphasizes even more the need for a solid academic background.

Personal construct theory adds a new dimension of understanding to women and work. It provides a means to explore each woman's uniqueness and explain her behaviour as interactions with her social and physical environment from the perspective of her "self." This study has provided a deeper understanding of women's work situations and why they remain in them. It also offers an explanation of why equity legislation is not as effective as was anticipated in providing equal opportunities. The findings point to areas relating to gender, race, and ethnicity in human rights legislation that forbid employers to ask certain types of questions, but the answers to these questions could be used as a data base for purposes of ensuring compliance with equity legislation.

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APPENDIX A

PILOT STUDY

Andrea

Andrea was a middle-aged women attending a vocational college in a large urban centre in western Canada. She completed one year of upgrading to meet the entry requirements of the Business Careers department and was now approximately half way through the 38-week secretarial/word processing program. Upon completion of her training, her goal was to obtain employment in an insurance office.

Background Information

Andrea's reference to her family was limited to stating that she was one of five children and that they "had a hard life." Her mother was ill and "was always in Alberta Hospital." She did not mention her father.

She completed grade 9 and started, but did not complete grade 10 and left school at age 16. She then took baby-sitting jobs until she married in 1975 at the age of 21. She was still married to the same person and had two children aged 10 and 12. Her husband was a field supervisor with a large company and was out of town two to three days a week.

Andrea decided about three years ago that she would like to work outside the home and realized that she would need to upgrade her education so that she could do so.

Educational Preparation for Work

Through a family friend who worked for Labour Canada, Andrea found out about the Career Development Centre. Her first step was to participate in their six-session career counselling program. Through her enquiries she found that Alberta Vocational College most closely met her needs as it provided academic

upgrading as well as skill training. Also, she could attend classes during the day so it did not interfere with her family obligations.

She stated that she "came here (AVC) for one year and got upgrading from Grade 9 to Grade 12." Further questioning revealed that her program consisted of the necessary preparation to enter the Business Careers program. This included Grade 10 math (algebra), some accounting, computer applications, typewriting, and English 33.

Furthermore, she stated that her "marks were just excellent. I haven't gotten under an 85 in anything." However, she contradicted her assessment several times: "I didn't enjoy math at all. I just struggled through it ... I just had a test and I don't think I did too good."

Also, Andrea placed emphasis on the area of skill development and appeared to underestimate the importance of the affective domain in the workplace. For instance, in response to the prompt, "So then you'll actually take different subjects," she said, "Yea. Different little things, business communications and things like that." As well, in the area of skill development, she gave conflicting information. She stated that she could type 31 words a minute. In response to the question, "And you've been at it now how long?" she said, "Ten weeks." However, she stated earlier that in Academic Upgrading the previous year she took "computer courses and typing courses" and that she had taken typing for two hours a day for the first ten-week block in her present program along with word processing and computer accounting--subjects which also rely heavily on keyboarding. Furthermore, she was now at week 15 in her present program of 38 weeks.

Perceptions of Work

Apart from her employment as a nanny from the time she left school at age 16 until her marriage at age 21, Andrea had not been employed outside the home. Her first reference to obtaining paid employment was her statement:

> I stayed home with my kids. I have two kids; one's ten and one's twelve and I decided that after they were in school and I had all day to myself there's nothing to do so it was time to maybe go out and find a job.

Her decision to seek office work was based upon her experience of helping a neighbour.

> My neighbour's an accountant. And about three years ago, that's what made me come back and think that I wanted to work in an office, he phoned me up one day and he asked me what I did with my days and I said, "Not much" and he said that he was just starting up a new office and wanted to know if I would come in and help him. Just help him set up . . . and I worked for him for about three weeks and I really enjoyed it. So ever since then that's where I decided that I wanted to go to work.

In response to the prompt, "So you have had some experience. You know what you're getting into," Andrea emphatically stated, "Oh yes."

When questioned about the type of office work she might want to pursue, Andrea replied, "I want to get into an insurance office." When asked, "Why?" she stated:

> I don't know why. But I have lots of friends that work in them and they say they are really nice, nice places to work.

Further questioning disclosed that she had investigated job opportunities in banking when she did a job search in her career counselling sessions. However, in response to the questions, "What jobs would be available in the bank? Do you have any idea of the salary?" she stated:

> I have no idea and I never asked her about how much she made. She said there was lots of part time.

Andrea's perceptions of work appeared to be based on hearsay rather than her own investigations of the workplace.

> I have lots of friends and they say. . .
>
> I have a friend who just moved to Toronto and she's doing that.
>
> This girl I was talking to said that she just wants to get some paper saying that she knows what she's doing so when she goes out to work for someone else she has a certificate so she probably knows lots and lots.

Commitment to Work

From her responses it would appear that Andrea was conscientious and hard working in both her school and her family commitments.

She completed one year of academic upgrading and she was now nearly half finished her program in Business Careers. She had driven to the college every day--a 30-minute drive which she thoroughly disliked. In fact, she stated that if she "had not found someone with which to car pool and I had to drive all by myself I would never have come." She also stated that she wanted to work in [a small town]; "I'm just so tired of driving every day to the city." She found the program hard because "you have so much homework," but also "very interesting. I'm really, really enjoying it." In response to the question, "What do find enjoyable about it?" she said:

> Mostly the people. Some of them are my friends now and being out of the house, that too. It seems funny to know people by myself, you know, that my husband or kids don't know.

As well, she had to incorporate her children's activities into her schedule. Her daughter belonged to Guides and her son to Squires. Both organizations involve community work along with the regular meetings. As well, both children bowled on Saturdays (at different times) and Andrea stayed to keep score for their teams. In addition, her husband often brought guests home for dinner.

"My husband is famous for bringing people home for supper. All the time. This week I had it only once." She often fed the two children her daughter babysits after school. She did all her own housework although she stated that her children sometimes helped her.

When asked about her future plans, Andrea said, "I plan on getting a job. Going to work." When questioned if she had anything in particular in mind, she said that she wanted to work in an insurance office. When asked if she had any specific ideas about what this job would involve, she said, "Whatever" and gave a vague reference to getting an underwriter's licence.

> Like this girl was telling me that they give her so many years and then she gets a underwriter's licence. Like they train you or whatever to to get a underwriter's licence so you can sell insurance and things like that.
>
> *Like house, car?*
>
> Anything. So like you get the basics here and then they have kind of an on-the-job training. I have a friend of mine who just moved to Toronto and she's doing that. She started off as a secretary and then she got this underwriter's licence.

When questioned about the salary range she said:

> I never asked. I don't really care where I work. Just something to do. So I can get out of the house. (Salary is not important to you?) No. I need something to do. That's my thing.

When asked about employment in the bank she stated that she had no idea what jobs were available nor was she aware of the salary schedule. She did state that part time work "sounded pretty good" as it would enable her to spend more time with her family.

The Relationship Between Pre-work Preparation and Work

Andrea indicated that she found the Business Careers program interesting and challenging but her lack of experience in the workplace gave her no frame of reference from which to assess her pre-work preparation. At some level she may

herself be aware of this as she acknowledged that those with experience were not as satisfied as she was.

> I like this program. Mind you there's a lot of people here that don't feel like they're learning enough.
>
> There was this girl I was talking to the other day and she just hated it. She said she wasn't learning anything that she didn't know before. Mind you she knew how to type and everything. But it's fine for me. Mind you everyone else might have a different opinion.

As well, Andrea had a tendency to assess the components of her pre-work preparation in terms of whether or not they provided personal enjoyment rather than for their perceived value in the workplace. "We have to make a speech and do it in front of the class. I'm really not too impressed." This affective evaluation appeared to influence her imagined ideal of the workplace. "Insurance offices are really nice, nice places to work."

Andrea consistently avoided reference to salary or remuneration of any sort and justified this to herself by stating that "I don't really care where I work. Just something to do. So I can get out of the house." and "I need something to do. That's my thing." (This also contradicted previous statements about her choice of employment.) As well, she presented conflicting information about her desire to "get out of the house" and her passive acceptance that part-time work would be more suitable so she would have more time with her family.

Discussion

The evolving world of work requires workers capable of resourcefulness and problem solving, rather than rote responses. People need to develop a solid foundation in literacy, familiarity with numbers and scientific principles, and analytical ability and communications skills. The new kinds of skills that will be needed by office workers in the "Information Society" are the ability to

conceptualize, integrate, apply logical direction to processes and communicate (Learning a Living in Canada).

Although Andrea received course credit in English 33, she consistently expressed herself in a substandard manner:

> There isn't much out there if you don't have no training or no education.
>
> And then you got to make supper and you got to find time to study and do other things.
>
> I don't know what it's called but you learn how to print things out and that.
>
> I don't know because I don't know what we're going to do. Like today was our test. Like on Monday I'm pretty sure she said we are just going back to typing like doing our drills and things like that.
>
> They went to the Space Sciences Centre for their astronomy or astrological badge.

Although Andrea had been in pre-work preparation for one and one-half years and participated in a pre-program career counselling/exploration program, her major source of information about her occupational choice and career decisions was anecdotal hearsay from others. Astin (1984) addressed this issue from a developmental perspective; that is, different individuals are at different developmental stages in their ability to make career choices, or in other words, they vary in career maturity.

Andrea's lack of a sense of vocational identity might well stem from her lack of role models. She appeared to have readily accepted the "status quo" that "women are socialized to learn and value a set of socially acceptable activities for which they are undervalued and underpaid" (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1984, p. 138).

As well, Andrea was faced with balancing multiple roles of student, wife, and mother. She appeared to have little help from her children and little or no

support from her husband in her various homemaking and school activities. There seemed little reason to believe this would change when Andrea entered the workplace. Kahn (1984) stated:

> Both expectations of success and achievement attributes are subject to a two-way influence: an individual's own beliefs and, most importantly, the beliefs that others hold for that person as an individual and for the person as a member of a certain social group. (p.145)

Therefore, the importance of significant others who may or may not provide the social legitimization of Andrea's career aspirations must also be considered.

According to her instructors, Andrea was one of the better students in Business Careers and she was expected to obtain suitable employment upon completion of the program. However, Andrea at this point, clearly did not see herself as an income earner with potential for promotion.

Bonnie

Bonnie was a middle-aged woman presently attending a vocational college in a large urban centre in western Canada. She had worked as a hair stylist for 17 years and was forced to change occupations after developing respiratory allergies to the hairdressing workplace. She attended college and received a certificate in management studies. However, as she was unable to procure employment, she enrolled in the Business Careers department of another college where she was now approximately half way through the 38-week secretarial/word processing program. Her goal was to own her own business.

Background Information

Bonnie was the oldest of three children but had eleven half brothers and sisters from three marriages on both her mother's and father's side. She quit school in Grade 11 "because there wasn't enough money so I had to go to work. There was no room for me either." After leaving school she worked in Banff for four summers before continuing her education. She married in 1979; she was still in her first marriage and had no children. Her husband accepted a position with a company in a small town where they moved and have lived for the past ten years.

Educational Preparation for Work

After working in Banff for four summers, Bonnie made a conscious decision to return to school.

> I lived in Banff and just really let loose. It seemed like all my childhood years were just combined into those four summers and I just let her go and I had a good time and then it was time to settle down.

Bonnie said that her first choice was nursing, but she found it unsatisfactory and did not complete her training.

> I had no problem with the theory end, but it was the practical end of it. I didn't know how to handle older people. I didn't like dealing with them that much. So I quit that and decided to go into hair styling.

She completed the hair styling program and worked as a stylist for 11 years in a small town and later in another town for 6 years until allergy problems forced her to quit. Bonnie stated that she owned her own shop for the last five years she worked in Calgary, but further questioning revealed that she:

> leased space but the business was mine. I had to just let the whole thing go when the interest rates went so high, like I just closed the door and left.

Later, when she was forced to quit because of allergies, she enrolled in the Management Studies program "to enhance the skills that I already had in running a business." Upon completion of the program, she registered with five different employment agencies which she determined to be the largest based on the number of advertisements which were placed in the newspaper:

> They all told me the same thing. Like nobody hires a manager. I did own my own shop for five years but it just didn't seem to be enough. . . . So I come to find out that because I don't have any clerical skills, no jobs are available. This is why I chose AVC. It made me open my eyes that's for sure.

When questioned about her secretarial program at AVC, Bonnie said:

> It's not what I want to do. You know, like I don't want to be a secretary. That's the last thing I want to be is a secretary. I'm only doing this to get clerical experience and it's something else to fall back on later.

Bonnie explained that 17 out of 30 students had either dropped out or had been required to withdraw from the program.

> To me that's a lot because it's not difficult. There's a lot of work involved but it's not difficult. Just a lot of it. Just time consuming busy work. It takes a long time to do it.

However, at the beginning of the interview she described the program as "It's been great so far."

Perceptions of Work

Bonnie expressed satisfaction with her career in hair styling. She indicated that she was good at her job and enjoyed the social atmosphere:

> It was unfortunate that I had to let go of the hair styling because it was very good to me and I loved it. I love working with people and the rewards were more than substantial.

However, when she had completed the Management Studies program and began looking for work she was surprised to find that her education and experience were inadequate, "it just kind of blew me away." Therefore, based on job information she received from five employment agencies, she came to AVC basically to get clerical skills. Although she did not want to be a secretary, she would consider clerical work in accounting. She acknowledged that the program in which she enrolled would not give her sufficient training to open her own business which was her ultimate goal. Also, she was aware of wage differences between male and female employees and was concerned about the consequences of cutbacks.

> How some of the government decisions affect real people. You read about things in the paper all the time but I never thought much about them and now here when we want to have a speaker in, for example, if we make a suggestion the first thing the teacher says is, "Is he free or does he charge because there's no money to pay for him in the budget." The paper says about how things affect departments (Bonnie felt she was independent and not part of a bureacracy which she determined had smaller categories called departments) not how it will affect me and before I wasn't in a department so I guess I just didn't know.
>
> *Did these things affect you when you were in your own business?*
>
> No, not really, well the GST certainly would have but I was so busy I didn't have time to read the paper and things like that, the GST, weren't law then. Sure the prices of things went up but everybody expected it to and I always raised my prices last so my customers thought they were getting a good deal.

Commitment to Work

Bonnie worked for most of her adult life and appeared to be committed to the world of work. She had 17 years of experience as a hair stylist along with five years of managing her own business. However, she thought she could assume a management position based on a certificate from a local community college and her five years of proprietorship. As well, she was unable to identify the types of management positions she thought she would be able to assume. She gave no evidence that she surveyed the job market to determine the reality of the situation before enrolling in the program. Bonnie found herself in a secretarial program when she had no intentions of becoming a secretary although she stated that it was "something to fall back on later." Presently, she thought "so maybe in the first couple of years when I finish with AVC I'll just maybe try to get in with the government." When asked why, she replied, "Security, good benefits, I haven't really decided yet." She then added, "But we've applied for adoption and if it comes through as it probably will, I won't have to bother about it."

The Relationship Between Pre-work Preparation and Work

The experience Bonnie received in her pre-work preparation for nursing was realistic enough to provide sufficient feedback so that she was able to determine that she had not made the right choice. When asked why she chose hair styling, Bonnie said it was the "logical thing to do." When asked why she chose nursing, she said that "I thought it would be different than what it was really all about. I mean, you don't really know what it's all about until you're there and do it." Although hair styling was her second choice, she gave a detailed account of how she, as a child, played hairdresser:

> My mother always told me I was born with a pair of scissors in my hands. The cats never had whiskers. I used to get these beautiful bride dolls for Christmas and about a month or so later they'd all be bald. My sister never had any hiar. I was always cutting her hair.

As she was able to obtain employment in hair styling and stay in this field for 17 years, it is likely that the pre-work preparation reflected the job market requirements.

However, at the local community college there appeared to be no preliminary or pre-enrollment investigation of the Management Studies program. Although Bonnie said she also considered two other postsecondary institutions, she felt the program description from the community college most closely reflected her perceived needs. After she completed the program, she was disillusioned about the job prospects and was unable to obtain employment. She then enrolled in the Business Careers Department at Alberta Vocational Centre in the secretarial program although she clearly stated that she did not want to be a secretary. She viewed this program as an interim measure in which to obtain clerical experience even though she said the course work in the program was "time consuming busy work" rather than difficult or challenging. She did not seem to have internalized that perhaps it was indeed representative of office work in general. Her decision to enroll was based upon information obtained from five employment agencies; however, as there were over 100 licensed agencies in the city, she may have approached only those agencies who offered clerical assistance to employers.

Bonnie was aware of the salary she could expect upon obtaining employment after graduation ($8 to $10 an hour), but later criticizes another student who was considering employment for $9 an hour on the basis that there was little opportunity for promotion or advancement.

Bonnie stated that her ultimate goal was to once again own her own business. When questioned if she had considered taking the entrepreneurial courses at a technical institute, she said that she had considered it but thought that if she "had a clerical certificate of some sort, it would be easier to find employment on a short-term basis in case the adoption came through."

Discussion

Reskin and Hartmann (1986) stated that "often the opportunities that women encounter in the labour market and in premarket training and education constrain their choices to a narrow set of alternatives" (p.125). Because of circumstances surrounding Bonnie's early home life, she was forced to leave school before completing Grade 11. Her lack of a high school diploma limited the options available to her when she decided to return to school. Although she stated that the Management Studies program most closely met her needs, further inquiry revealed that it was one of the few programs with openings available, and one of the few that would accept her without a high school diploma and would provide upgrading in addition to her regular course work. As well, because she was taking upgrading classes concurrently, she received a certificate instead of a diploma in the program. Either way, it is commonly recognized that a high school diploma is a prerequisite to most postsecondary institutions and to employment with promotion potential. Bonnie still did not have a high school diploma.

Bonnie's perceptions of reality also require discussion. She agreed with the comment that she was very good at hair styling and said:

> It was unfortunate that I had to let go of the hair styling because it was very good to me, and the rewards were more than substantial. I did own my own shop for five years.

Hair styling provided Bonnie with her only social life in a small community, and it met her need for approval from others. However, further inquiry revealed that she did not actually own her own shop. She leased building space and when she was no longer able to make the rent and equipment payments she simply left it. She and her husband then moved to a small town where she worked part time for six years until her respiratory problems forced her to seek an alternative career.

Bonnie stated that her studies in the secretarial/word processing program "have been great so far. I haven't regretted any of it." However, she later stated "There's a lot of work involved but it's not difficult. Just time consuming busy work." As well, she stated, "the last thing I want to be is a secretary." In response to the question, "Why are you taking a secretarial program when you don't want to be a secretary?" she stated:

> It's something to fall back on later. If we adopt, then later on I'll have a piece of paper saying I'm qualified for something. You know, you need that piece of paper and there's always jobs advertised for secretaries and things especially for part time.

This statement does not appear to reinforce her objective of owning her own business once again, but instead, reflects a stereotypical myth of the role of women in the workplace.

> . . . women are not committed to employment in the marketplace, that their commitment is to family and home. Women prefer part-time employment. (Peitchinis, 1989, p. 34)

Bonnie's statement also reflects what is defined by Astin (1984) as "structure of opportunity" or "a way of depicting how social forces shape and reshape occupational decisions" (p.122).

The contradictions in Bonnie's statements appear to be a form of self-justification or interpretation of the reality, or perhaps even a denial of the

reality. Bonnie is 43 years old and still expects to adopt an infant; she still does not have a high school diploma; she is in a secretarial program when she does not want to be a secretary. She expected to be hired as "a manager" based on a one-year college certificate and her previous experience which included bankruptcy. She emphasized the positive aspects of hairstyling, and was reluctant to admit that she lost the business because of an insufficient income to cover her expenses. Also, it is unlikely that all her clients were satisfied all the time. As well, she hopes to start her own business again although she does not know in what field.

Upon completion of her present program, Bonnie feels that she will have little difficulty obtaining employment with promotional opportunities.

APPENDIX B

NOTICE FOR PARTICIPANTS

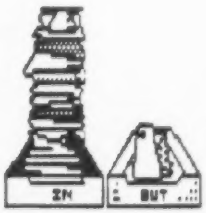
HELP NEEDED

I AM A UNIVERSITY STUDENT

WHO NEEDS SOME WOMEN
TO INTERVIEW

IF YOU ARE 35 TO 45 YEARS OLD
AND IN THE CLERICAL FIELD
I WOULD LIKE TO INTERVIEW
YOU!

PLEASE CALL BARB
488-6268



APPENDIX C

CAREER ASPIRATIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE

CAREER ASPIRATIONS INTERVIEW GUIDE

Research Question 1 - What is the nature of the career aspirations of mature women?

Focus a) Rationale which women give for their choices
b) The degree of concurrence between occupational aspirations and actions taken for career preparation.

Interview Questions	Areas to be Explored
1. How did you get into this type of work?	- Educational preparation for work - Commitment to work - Expectations from work (including affective domain) - Career focus - Reality gap - Areas of naivete - Risk taking
2. Are there some things about this type of work (job) that you did not expect?	

Research Question 2 - How or to what extent are socialization patterns perceived to have influenced your present position?

Focus - Multiple roles

Interview Questions	Areas to be Explored
3. How do you feel about working?	- perceptions of "work" e.g. what constitutes "work"?
4. How do your significant others feel about your working?	- how does she define work? - does she differentiate or query work as inside or outside the home? - influence of family & friends upon perceptions of available choice. e.g. part-time, full-time, accepting promotion if it means greater responsibility - family responsibilities - shifting relationships

Research Question 3 - How do women's job seeking strategies influence their position in the labour market?

Focus - Sources of information

Interview Questions	Areas to be Explored
5. How did you get this job? How did you find out about this program?	- role of peer networks - concept of job or career progression - role of career counselling (if any)
6. What kind(s) of work have you done before?	

APPENDIX D

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE

Highest grade completed _____ When? _____ Where?_____

Other education _____

Present marital status _____

Do you have children living with you? _____ If yes, how many?_____

Do they live with you all the time? _____ Occasionally? _____

Whose children are they? _____ Age(s) of children _____

Do you have grandchildren living with you? _____

If yes, how many? _____ Age(s) of grandchildren _____

Is there anyone else who lives with you? _____

If yes, does this person contribute some financial support? _____

Do you live in a house, apartment, or condominium? Own? Rent?

How would you describe your health? _____

How would you describe the health of your family members? _____

_____

If you are a student, please complete this page.
If you are in the workforce, please complete the next page.
If you are both, please complete both pages.

Are you attending school part time?_____ full time? _____

Who is financing your schooling? _____

How long have you been taking upgrading? _____

How long in this program? _____

How long in other programs? _____

When do you expect to complete this program? _____

Describe other courses, workshops, or programs you have taken.

_____

_____

_____

Have you ever worked outside the home for pay? yes_____ no_____

If yes, was it part time? _____ full time? _____ both? _____

What was/were your position(s) _____

_____

_____

Why did you leave?_____

_____

_____

If you are presently in the workforce, please complete this page.

Are you working part time? _____ full time? _____

How long have you been in your present position? _____

What is your job title? _____

What do you do? _____

_____

_____

How did you find this position? _____

Did you attend a specialized program or course of study to obtain this position? _____ If yes, please describe it. _____

Have you previously taken any courses, workshops, etc? _____

If yes, please describe them. _____

_____

Briefly describe previous position(s) and give reason for leaving.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Date

Dear

I am presently a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. Because of my background, I am interested in office occupations and have chosen to focus my research in this area.

I would appreciate it if you would let me interview you. I would like you to tell me your "work story." That is, I want to know how you got into secretarial work in the first place, how you came to be in your present position, how you feel about your work, and how you think your significant others (if any) feel about your work. The interview will not be structured and these topics will serve only as a guide.

I expect the interview will take 45 to 60 minutes and will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you. It will be taped and I will transcribe it; from the transcription, I will develop a profile. I would then like to meet with you again to see if you feel the profile accurately portrays you, and for you to change or delete any information you wish. You and I will be the only ones who will have access to this information at this stage. All names and places will be changed. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you have any questions, I shall be glad to answer them. If you wish to participate, I look forward to meeting you.

Sincerely,

Barb Downes
Telephone: 488-6268

APPENDIX F

SAMPLE OF TRANSCRIPTS

The following excerpts from the transcripts illustrate the five themes that emerged from the data. As well, they represent as broadly as possible the diversity of each individual. The transcripts have been edited for pauses and non-committal sounds, and have been punctuated. Three participants, Jennifer, BJ, and Raelene, edited their own transcripts for grammar and punctuation when they were given their copies to review. Even though they were assured of anonymity, they still insisted the transcripts be corrected. As the participants had the final say, I respected their wishes.

Self → Cultural Controls

This theme represents the self/world relationship of each woman established by the socialization process of her culture.

Jennifer (student)

What did you do after you finished school?

> My mother was ill quite a lot so I was expected to stay home from school to look after her. I have five brothers and I was the only girl so my father expected me to stay home and take care of the family, which I did. Coming from an Irish background, it was expected of me. My father would have liked me to have stayed home all the time to help my mother but I wouldn't. Still I would have like to have stayed on in school and gotten more exams but my father wanted me at home. And then I got tired of it and I got a job. I had limited education and I know my father was extremely disappointed with me that I wouldn't stay home and just take care of him and my brothers, but I was lucky that I had a job where I could work early and leave at noon so I could make supper and do the house.

How long did you work at home before you found your job?

> For about a year after I left school. The school that I went to was sort of a semi-private school and the funds weren't there. There was no typing. I didn't take any sciences. The girls didn't do that, boys did. In some ways, looking back, I felt that I was jilted of a good education.

Because of the discrimination?

> No, not necessarily. More because of the type of school we went to. There are some very good schools in England but my parents wanted me to go to a Catholic school. There were some marvellous schools around where I lived but they wanted me to go to a Catholic one which was poorly funded because there weren't many Catholics in the area. I suppose as far as they were concerned my soul was more important than my education. And as a parent you have to make those decisions. But I

knew when I left school that I wanted to be at school. I knew that from the day I left.

So this is really the first opportunity you've had to go back?

It isn't the first opportunity. As I said, I could have gone back when the children were a little younger but I was scared. Yes, I was nervous and insecure about it then.

What did your husband think about your going back to school?

He didn't mind it at all as long as it didn't affect the home life. He still doesn't, he's very good. He doesn't mind at all. If I would have said back then when the children were younger, I'm going back to school, he wouldn't have minded then as long as it didn't affect him and the home, but that's what I wanted to do.

So your first career was being a wife and mother.

Right, and it still is and it always has been even through this.

And this is now your second career choice?

At the beginning of the business course they tell you to forget everything and to put your life on hold. Even your families sometimes have to take a back seat, but I couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. My family has always come first, even my husband.

Did you find you were still doing all the other things in addition to going to school? and it would probably be the same if you went to work?

Yes, it would be, I know. That's why I'm saying if I look for something it will be part-time because I don't think it's fair to a woman to have to kill herself. I mean, I was going around in circles and trying to keep everything looking half decent. But I know myself, for me, I have to keep things fairly tidy.

Because others expect you to or because you like it?

Well, my husband likes the house to be tidy and it bothers him if it's not and I feel that he works hard enough that I don't want to start, well, we've never argued about it but I certainly don't want to start arguing about the house. To me, our marriage is more important.

Sharalyn (student)

What about your responsibilities at home?

In my culture the wives do most of the work but he [husband] is an understanding man. So I have to pull my share of the weight. He helps me out as much as he can. It's not his fault really, because when I go home I have to get the stuff all ready, and you see he had two children living in the house. One is gone away now and he's living in Toronto, but we have another one and you know what a teenager is like. We are having problems with the boys and whatnot, and he has been sick as well. He's not well at all, and I didn't realize that when we got married. He did tell me, but I was so engrossed in my schooling that I didn't pay much attention to what I was doing. I can't blame him either really. It happened and now you don't cry over spilled milk. You just try and make the best of what you have. He's tried his best but a woman's job still never ends. When you go home, you just can't sit back and say, "Well, I'm going to do my homework or school work and leave everything aside." You might leave it for a day or two but then you still have to do it. It waits for you. It just doesn't get done by itself. And they like everything ironed so you're ironing once a week. I only wash clothes once a week because it's just too much. But you'd be surprised how many clothes pile up. I do the cleaning all day Saturday, so then weekdays I only have to do the supper and get the dishes and do other things.

What other things?

Get ready their lunch and like the shopping and all these little bits. It never ends.

BJ (employed)

You never perceived yourself as having choices?

I had no choice. I was told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. It was just the way it was. My parents were both from the old country and I was the daughter. I would be on view but I must behave with the appropriate manners and follow in the appropriate category of getting married, raising a family and taking care of my own brood.

You said earlier that you've always worked. How do you feel about working?

Yes, I've always worked. I was a hospital aide while I was in grade 12. I was a typist while I was going to school, and so I'd work and go to school, and work and go to school. Money was not to be had as far as I was concerned. The only way I could get money was by earning it. Allowances were unheard of. To give you an example, the clothing was chosen for me, and there was no makeup, definitely no makeup. The last time my mother ever clobbered me was when I was 17 years old. She really hit me a good one because I was five minutes late coming home. Then when I came to Edmonton, I mean, the most I ever did with my hair was I wore it in long braids that came down to my waist. Girls didn't cut their hair. You didn't need these frivolities. But I loved my parents. But

that was just the way it was. Then when I came to Edmonton, I lived at the "Y" (YWCA) for eight months.

And then?

Moved with three other girls into a damp basement apartment which had a six-foot ceiling and in the middle of winter, frost came through the walls. It froze the curtains to the wall. And the landlady would come in and turn the heat off because we were gone during the day. I can give you the exact address of the place. It was [name] and I will never forget it. I suffered from post-nasal drip that whole winter.

Why did you stay there?

It was cheap. We had one bed and one chesterfield and we took turns. Two of us would sleep on the bed and one on the chesterfield. Then we'd switch.

How long did you do that?

We lived in that place until about ... oh dear, one of the girls got married and the other girl and I decided that we just couldn't afford this place so we moved to another apartment on [name] Street and I lived there until I met my husband.

And then you got married?

Yes and moved to a house on [name of] Street and then it was about a year and a half when the baby was born and we decided that we would buy the house. I had $1200 saved up for university which went as a down payment on the house. Then we found that we couldn't afford it. My daughter was born on October 24 and I was back at work on January 2.

That was your first child? Did you keep working after you got married?

Yes, and even after my daughter was born. I went back when she was about two and a half months old. We found that we really couldn't afford it so we sold that house and we bought another one and our payments were about $96 a month. I thought, this is great I can do some saving maybe, but it didn't work that way. It seemed every time we sort of got ahead, my husband got laid off which meant that my husband had three careers and I just went back to work. He got laid off in December and got a part-time job and I went back to work in January and I worked for the government. That is how I got into government work as a permanent career.

In fact, when I got pregnant with my daughter I worked until the end of September and she was born October 24. Nobody knew I was pregnant. I was lucky. I was one of the fortunate ones because when you got pregnant you had to remove yourself as soon as you showed. The only

one who knew I was pregnant was my supervisor and he never said anything and as long as I never showed it I could stay. I only actually gained 17 pounds and I gained it all over my body and everybody kept saying that marriage agrees with you and I would say, "Ya."

Did you find it difficult keeping it a secret?

No. I played a game. I love to play these games. Just to see how far I could get away with it. The first year they watched me carefully but after that they forgot, and then that's when I was pregnant. And that's how I got into this. I went back in January and went to personnel and the personnel manager happened to be a friend of mine. He said, "We have these jobs open. Which one would you choose?" There was one in the museum and I love to deal with antiques. I love antiques and so I said, "Hmmm, this would be interesting and his words were, 'You'll never last with (the director)'." Again, I love a challenge and I thought, "Aha! you'll eat your hat." So actually, the personnel officer and I had a good dinner on that one. We made a bet and I outlasted the director. He had a reputation as quite the womanizer.

Self → Institutions

This theme discusses the roles various institutions played in the choices of the participants.

Jennifer (student)

How did you feel about school?

I felt sometimes overwhelmed with all the courses you have to take in the business course, and I felt I wasn't doing anything that well because I didn't get the time to do everything that well. I didn't have enough time, so I was trying to do a little of everything and I don't know if I did it, well I did it obviously okay, but I think maybe it's harder for some people.

How did you find the workload?

A lot of it was busy work, checking out different computers and programs and what the computers do. That was just one course, but there's a lot of time consuming when you have to come home and start doing housework and preparing supper and looking after others.

I worked quite well just on my own just doing what I had to do, but when it came to a test I was just a wreck. Nothing ever went right for me. Something always went wrong when I was doing a test.

Like what?

Well, if I was working on WordPerfect, I knew how to do all the stuff. I'd even be showing someone how to do some of it, but if it was on a test I'd go to do it and I'd be the one who couldn't do it and I'd almost blow the test. I was just a wreck. I mean, I would pass it but I never felt I got the marks I should have got. I would get so nervous on a test that I would just be stupid and do something dumb and then it would take a long time to get it back to where you wanted to be.

In upgrading I could write quite good essays, but when I had to write under pressure my mind would go blank and I couldn't think. Then it would be near the end and I felt I was rushing.

Sharalyn (student)

Why did you come back to school?

I didn't have a really good education so that I could go out to work. I needed money to live. I couldn't live off my family for the rest of my life, so what could I do? It wasn't an easy decision to make, to go back to school. This isn't a lie. I went to that school, almost to the door three times and came back, before I had the courage to go in. And my sister said, "You have to go on in. You can't go on like this. If you want to have an education you'll have to go in there and better yourself so that hopefully you'll get a nice job."

So I went in, and they gave me a test and I found that I was low. When I went to school before it was a different kind of system. Although it was a British system it was different. I did up to grade 10 and I did well in those courses. I never failed or anything. I always passed but as I said I had to quit school because of circumstances, and I never thought that I would have to go back to school.

Tell me how you feel about school?

I have to complete English 33 because we have a government exam in January. We are doing English communications as well. We started English 33 in our 10-week block which started in November and we have to finish for the government exam the end of January. We have Christmas but we go until December 24, and we start back on January 2. We don't get days off. The only day off we had was last Friday. We don't even get half days. If you are sick, it's just too bad.

Every five weeks we do an exam to see if we are succeeding in the courses. Today we got the results of the last five weeks. We are in the fifteenth week now. Actually we are in the fourteenth week because we are going to lose a week, Christmas week. We started this week with accounting on computers, WordPerfect 5.0, English 33, and communications.

Let me tell you what we do everyday. We start at half past 8 in the morning with work assignment period. Then we have accounting on the computer. It's called automated accounting so we just follow the directions and do it. After that we have English communications. Until now we were doing all the grammar but now we are getting into letter writing and things like that. Last semester we did typing and letters and things on the typewriter, manually really. We are doing everything on the computers from now on. Then we have English 33 then we have a break for one hour for lunch. We don't have a break for coffee or anything. We go from half past eight and that's it till half past twelve. At half past one we go to WordPerfect and after that it's office procedures. And then we have homework. Oh yes, so much. That bag is so heavy. Really you could be reading until midnight. No wonder when you come in in the morning you have forgotten half because you are so tired. Your brain can only take so much.

When I get up at half past five in the morning every morning how much can you really take in. I get home around 5 o'clock although I leave here at half past three. By the time I get two buses and arrive home it's five o'clock.

I do everything in the house and it's eight o'clock by the time I sit down again to do my homework. I don't watch TV or anything. I don't look at a newspaper, I don't have time to even have a chat with anybody. My head is down again on those books until midnight. If I'm too tired maybe 11 o'clock when I head for bed. And then even sometimes you are overtired so you can't sleep so up again at half past five. I have to be outside waiting for a bus at half past six otherwise I wouldn't get here on time.

I don't mind doing it. Don't get me wrong. I'm not complaining. If I can get through this course I will be very lucky and if I can get a job at the end of this all then it will be worth my while, but if I don't get a job, then I don't know what I am going to do.

Do you find the work itself difficult?

It is not academically challenging. I can do it but you could work 24 hours and you would never finish it. I wonder if so much is necessary.

Is it fair to say that you are being swamped with busy work? Nothing challenging just more of the same.

Yes, just busy work. Always just more of the same. Like we did with the accounting. All of that (holds up text). If we were going to do that why did we have to do both the manual and the computer. This will be my third time with this accounting. Do we need that? The same accounting?

It's the same? Is one 10, one 20 and one 30?

I did 10/20 the last semester. Before that I did it in upgrading. Then when I started in Business Careers I had to do the same thing again. Now we are doing the same thing again on computers. So why didn't we have to do it on computers the second time instead of the third time. You know what I mean? We are doing the same thing over and over again.

What about your typing courses? Are they the same?

We did typing last semester. I did very well, in fact I got 98. When I started I had 56 words per minute. It went down a bit when they started deducting for accuracy. I didn't mind that because you can always get your speed again but with more accuracy. I did very well in accounting. On the last part which is the final exam I got 97 and overall I got 90. But that was manual, it wasn't on the computer. But you try to do it on the computer all over again. I have no computer experience at all so why didn't they give us accounting on the computer last semester?

You could type 56 words a minute when you came into the program?

Yes.

And you still had to take a typing course?

Because when we do word processing now in this next semester, we do a lot of word processing, so you need a lot of typing.

But you could type 56 words a minute when you came into the program. Could you challenge the final or something and get credit for it or do you have to take the course?

No you have to take typing. I don't think you could challenge typing. I think you can challenge English, math and maybe accounting, I guess, but not typing I'm pretty sure. I saw some people challenging some other courses but not typing. Some could do this because they were already exempted because they already had grade 12 credit and I didn't have grade 12. But I don't mind doing English. I like English and I'm good at it so I can do it.

Colleen (employed)

Have you ever tried to upgrade your education?

Oh yes, I was accepted at university but I was turned down by the Student Finance Board for a student loan. I don't make enough money to get by on part-time work even if my supervisor okay'd it. The student finance clerk said that even if I did get a job when I finished, I wouldn't be in the work force long enough to be able to pay it all back if I went part time.

> And besides they won't fund anything part time. It's only full time and then they didn't think I should be quitting my job to go to university. It was very discouraging. I'm actually trapped where I am unless the economy picks up and more positions become available so I can apply for a competition. And I'm still really upset about losing my application fee, too.

Self → Expert Other

Sharalyn (student)

This theme represents the interactions of those persons in positions of power and/or authority with the participants.

What made you decide on the secretarial program?

> Actually, I didn't decide. The guy who interviewed me in Calgary said that because I had a little bit of typing experience and that from working in the newspaper that it would be a good idea to do secretarial. I suggested nursing and he said secretarial, but he didn't suggest anything else.

When he suggested secretarial work did he make any other suggestions? What I mean is, did you have your choice of a bunch of courses?

> Well, I suppose he was right. I was too old to do nursing. For nursing you need a younger person. He said, "You're better to stick with secretarial." And I said, "Is it going to be easier for me to do it?" and he said, "Yeah, you should be okay because you speak good English and you have some knowledge so you shouldn't have any problem because you have the typing behind you." Perhaps he didn't realize what it was going to be like at that time, and I never changed my goal. I suppose I should have looked into it, but then I said that if I stop that and go back again to do nursing that means I have to start all over again with biology, social, and so really, which is worse?

Nursing and secretarial were the only two choices presented to you?

> He didn't give me any choice. I don't know if there were any other courses that he might have suggested to me to do that would have taken a shorter time.

But he didn't make any suggestions besides the nursing and secretarial?

> I suggested the nursing and he said secretarial but he didn't suggest anything else. I didn't think it was my place to question him because these people are the ones who know what's best because that's his job. I never thought to question him, but now I'm not so sure about this whole business.

BJ (employed)

What made you decide on the secretarial program?

> I needed money to go to university and this was about the only field that would hire somebody that didn't have experience or a degree, and it was the quickest one to get into. When I graduated from high school, I had honours, over 80% average. I came here with $20 in my pocket, got off the bus and went to the YWCA, booked a room and spent $19 on my month's rent and then proceeded to campus to enroll in engineering. . . They (counsellors) were quite clear that this engineering was for males, not females. I found out that I couldn't get any funding and that there would be no way that I could possibly go to university unless I had the money up front. I know that at that point my mind went blank. . . . And the counsellor told me about AVC and that's how I got into this. They paid you $10.50 a week.

Do you think engineering was a realistic goal?

> It was a very realistic goal. But my parents, or really just my father, did not believe in women going to university so therefore for money, I had to earn it and I just didn't quite make it. At the time there were no other forms of financing or student loans, at least to my knowledge. I had spoken to counsellors and they had said no, and they all sort of raised their eyebrows at me.

Denied Self → Fulfillment and Growth

This theme discusses the compromises these women saw as their only viable alternative to external situations.

Sharalyn (student)

Tell me about your previous education.

> I had to quit school when I was about 16. We were 12 in the family and my parents were killed in an accident. My brother, my sister, and myself, the three of us had to opt out of school so we could go out to work in order to keep the rest of the family so they could their education and everything. There was no social welfare or anything like that in Africa. Although I am Indian, I was born in Africa. There was no such thing as social welfare so we had to go out to work in order to give us shelter and everything, in other words in order to live really.
>
> So eventually when the others all got their education we were still working. I attended some of the evening classes as the job required things so I always took small courses like typing or going to learn English or something like that.

I tried to keep up. I spoke English but it wasn't very good in the beginning so I had to educate myself. Then I married and I was still kind of working and it didn't matter so much. But what happened was my husband died.

All my brothers and sisters grew up and they had found their own ways. Some of them were married and some of them were working and so now I have to do something about myself.

Colleen (employed)

How did you feel when your husband insisted you quit work?

That it was a mistake. Looking back I think I could have continued with what I was doing [real estate sales] and managed to keep a home and my children, but I got sidetracked with what my husband wanted. He didn't like it [her working]. When I needed his support, say when I was going on an appointment, he would do something to upset me.

Like?

He would go off somewhere with the only car we had. . . . [another time] I had a leg injury and had a full leg cast and [husband] left for two days without a word to anyone. He knew I could not make it upstairs or downstairs by myself and the children were in school all day.

BJ (employed)

Do you feel you have pay and promotional opportunities equal to the men's?

No, very definitely not, You don't get promotions. I've had to apply outside of being asked to come with me, but it's always been to be my secretary or something, my secretary will do this, or my secretary will do that, almost as if we were servants. I've had more experience and higher qualifications for the most part than my male supervisors. In one of the first jobs I was doing all the assistant work, all the legwork, checking on all the legal aspects, checking through files, records, checking all the precedents, and I was "his girl." And that summed it up. In fact, I left that job because of what we would now call an assault. I found out that he went through six of "his girls" in a very short period of time but nothing was ever done about him. But I was naive. I was brought up very naive. I had no idea.

But there isn't any pay equity. There really isn't. In fact, here in this department, we have two females acting as deputy directors and they supervise a lot of males and they make only about $70 more than the guys they supervise. And their male counterparts make much closer to the

managers' salaries. The old boys' thing is alive, well, and thriving, and I think it will be for a long time.

Raelene (employed)

How do you feel about your job?

Well, I've been putting in all these years doing the work of three people, and I'm not to say that part of it isn't my own fault, and now of course the economy being what it is, my choices are even less and I'm fortunate that I have a job that is a permanent position. That is something else. There have been jobs that have come and that really looked enticing, but they were all temporary positions for maybe a year. And I don't want to risk losing a permanent position. If I work at the job for a year and then it's phased out, where am I? So this is another reason that I've held on.

It's just that I have no, well challenge in my actual job. My challenge in typing for instance is just to see how fast I can get it done. There's no challenge for me in that. And I've also been basically a word processor where I just sat all day and did word processing and that just about drove me out of my mind because then I really felt like I was just part of the furniture. You're only there to get the job done and you just prioritize the work and get it done as quickly as you could and if you weren't there then everybody was just in a tailspin and yet while you were there nobody even seemed to know that you were actually there. And you were just like a machine. You didn't have time to get involved with anything. You just sat and type type type all day long.

How do you remain sane? Especially since you've been her for six years and have been put back to a Clerk I.

Right. Basically there is no way to reclassify me. They did try to reclassify it and the only way I can possibly find another job that I would enjoy is for me to take some courses and this is what I am considering now. I've sort of spun my wheels and couldn't make a decision and I wasn't sure what I wanted to do and now I've sorted out the part of the job I really enjoy and it's had some bonuses. Certainly getting to know people and the students.

My ambition is to get to know as many of the students every term by their first name and I've managed to do that to the point where I know 3/4 of the students by first name and it paid off because I'm also a member of Toastmasters which I really enjoy and as a result of that I was asked to give the keynote address at the College graduation in June and I spoke to 1100 people and I knew that I had really been accepted when they introduced me and a lot of the students and some of the staff didn't know I was going to speak and when they introduced me I got such an ovation from the students that I had wait for it quieten before I could even begin to speak. It was such a thrill and so unexpected I really wasn't sure how

to react. I felt like I had brought my own fan club along. So that was a real thrill.

As I say, there have been bonuses and also because of Toastmasters I've spoken to some of the business classes--at least 6 different classes on the topic of communication and its importance on the job as well as the benefits of belonging to a club such as Toastmasters especially if you are in the business career field. And I enjoyed that because, of course, I knew a lot of the students and I felt quite relaxed, and I think they could relate to me. They knew where I worked and they could see, I told them explicitly that one time I could never speak the way I do. And it was a very relaxed atmosphere and I really enjoyed it but my real coupe was the graduation. That was a real thrill.

Wow. That must have been great. I just want to back track a bit. You said you have been working there six years and you are still at a Clerk I?

Actually it's a I/II but I'm at the top of the pay scale and I have been for a while. Because of my experience they started me above the minimum entry level. That's what I mean, my only way to get an increment is to go from a 37 1/2 to a 40 hour week and that's what I've been doing for two years now. And I really question whether it's worthwhile because my job when the students are all there is very harried. It's very stressful and at times, well, I thought I could handle everything, but then a couple of times when there have been extra jobs put on me that I didn't think I could handle it last year. I managed but you get a little resentful. People have no idea how busy you are, and they don't stop to think and again, it's a case of taking you for granted. And I guess this is the part that really bothers me, you know you do a good job and you enjoy doing a good job but then you start being taken for granted and little things like forgetting my anniversary date for my appraisal. I hope it went in in time but I could wind up waiting an extra month to get my increment and also being overlooked for a position that was created and not even being told that this position was being created. Whether or not I would have qualified for it, it would have been nice to know that I was offered an opportunity to try. But that wasn't even the case. A lot of bitterness and a lot of well not even sour grapes but I'm in a situation and I guess this is what I resent. I'm in a situation where the staff and I get along well, and if I were to voice my opinion on how that other job was handled then of course I would come across as perhaps something like sour grapes and I might create a strain in the relations between the girls in the office whereas at the moment we get along well. I bite my tongue a lot and don't say a lot because all it would do is ruin the atmosphere. And from what I hear we are very fortunate in having one of the offices where people really do get along well. But in the last couple of years I've seen things go on that I haven't liked but I'm not in a position to stir up the air. I've been fortunate in that the office has been redesigned a bit so that I'm pretty much over and away from the rest of the people in the office so that I can work on my own and don't have to get caught up in the office politics.

I'm busy enough and I don't need to be bothered by it so I do a lot on my own. I react on my own. I do a lot of interim counselling and that's something that I really enjoy.

Interim counselling?

Yes, absolutely. And I know the counsellors appreciate it. I don't think anyone really knows how much I do in that field except the counsellors and they are very grateful because I can sort out an emergency from a non-emergency and they know too now that if I ask them to see someone above their appointments, they know I ask only because I really feel that it is necessary. Otherwise because I screen, I know who can wait for an appointment and who can't. And they know that too, so if I ask, they don't usually turn me down. I guess I try to make my own challenges, but I guess I resent doing all this extra work and not getting any pay or official recognition for it.

Dependent Self → Independence

Sharalyn (student)

How did you manage after your husband's death?

It was really difficult. In fact, I'm really just beginning to realize just how lost I was. You see, I had nobody in the whole country at that time and I couldn't burden my friends too much. And I think that's why I got married again without knowing what I was doing but don't think I'm blaming anyone but myself. You see, my first husband took such good care of me and we had a happy life like I told you before and so I just thought that it would be so nice to have someone take care of me again so I don't have to worry so much. I can take care of myself but you know what I mean. But it turned out that I just had someone else to take care of on top of everything else. That's what I get for getting married to someone in my own culture.

Janice (student)

Do you ever see yourself as the primary wage earner?

No.

Why?

[shrugs shoulders]

You think your husband will always be the primary wage earner?

Hopefully.

But you've worked a long time. Pretty well since your son . . .

Yes, since my son was born.

Did you find that difficult? Like did you have some sort of support system or someone to help you?

No, I did it myself. I got divorced when my son was nine months old so that's pretty well why I had to stay working because I didn't want to be a welfare recipient.

Let me just summarize here. So you finished grade 11 in high school and then you were... (married) and had a son and divorced your husband when your son was nine months old and then you remarried four years ago. So you were a single mom all that time.

Right.

And you did everything yourself?

Right.

Did you have any family around to help out occasionally?

Well my mom and dad were around but as far as help, no I didn't. They didn't help me and I didn't expect them too. But because of my income my daycare was subsidized and that was a big help.

But it was still pretty tight. Like you could probably teach the budgeting part of your program.

Yeah I probably could and you know I still do it and it just drives my husband crazy but it's something that's just in me. It's hard to get away from.

But you had to do that for a long time. At that time had you ever considered changing occupations or getting something that paid more.

No, because I didn't know how I would go to school and pay for it. I was always looking but as far as upgrading and stuff is that what you mean?

Yeah.

Well, by the time I got home from work and did the other stuff that was enough. As far as taking other classes I did take that one in bookkeeping one but I found it pretty hard because there was a lot of homework in it at nights and it was hard for me to do it.

You had to go to work and even with taking one night class it was really difficult.

Yes, it was two nights a week and my mom babysat those nights.

But it was just like, too much?

Yes, it really was.

Sandi (employed)

What made you decide to go back to school?

I had a daughter to support and I knew I had to go back. Plus I wanted to. The need was there but also the desire was there.

So it was really a combination of need and desire. And clerical was your first choice?

Yes

This was your first choice and everything seems to be working out?

Yes it does.

How did you get into this type of work?

I was a single parent and I decided to go back to school and I picked Office Administration because it was a one-year course and there was a high placement rate for when I was finished. So I think that's why I picked clerical although I really at that time did not know what I wanted to do.

How long ago was it that you went back to school?

Four years ago

And you took Office Admin?

Yes

What was involved in that program?

It was a ten-month course and we took five different computer courses; we took business communications, typing, math, office procedures. There was quite a bit involved in it.

And you did all that in 10 months?

Yes I did.

Why did you choose clerical again?

Because there was a high placement rate and it was only a ten-month course.

Had you considered any other types of employment besides clerical?

I went to Career Opportunities but I really was still quite undecided about what I wanted to do so I just decided on clerical?

What's Career Opportunities?

It's a government organization that is downtown. It's held for three evenings but they push you through it at such a heavy pace. There were so many, many different employment opportunities or types of employment that you could get into but you didn't have a chance to really find out that much about any of them. You just saw them briefly and I so I didn't really benefit from it too much.

So you could say that you sort of did receive a bit of counselling?

Yes I did.

Did anything that any of the counsellors said or anything indicate that this would be a good opportunity for you or perhaps you may want to consider something else or anything like that?

No, actually it was a friend that went through it before I did that made me make up my mind.

Your friend then was your chief advisor?

Yes

Did she go through it much before you did?

Two years before.

And was she able to find employment?

Yes, she found employment right away.

When you went through this program, you planned on being employed full time until you retire? This to you then was a career change or a career move?

Yes, it was definitely a career change.

Had you looked at any of the different opportunities that would be available to you as a clerical worker?

I wanted to get into a big company where there would be room for movement and where you could further extend your studies and grow within that company. That's why I picked something big rather than a smaller outfit.

And have you found that this company has given you room for movement?

Yes, I already went up one step within a year so I'm very pleased.

Do they offer any training courses or upgrading courses or anything like that with them?

Oh yes, I've taken different computer courses with them already and anything that relates to your job, they will cover that for you.

I want to just go back a bit. So career opportunities are important to you and progression and promotion and that type of thing? Does this company offer you a way out of the clerical field if you so choose or do you have promotional opportunities within the clerical field?

Yes, there are promotional opportunities within the clerical field. If I wanted to take accounting or any other course like that, there are so many different clerical positions within the company that definitely there is room for both growth and movement.

Upward or lateral movement?

Upward movement.

And you've already gone up one step. How many steps are there in your area?

Well, there's five, no there would be six steps.

What happens you get to step 6?

There are management courses that you would probably take and get into the supervisory area, train as a supervisor because you would have all the experience behind you.

I'd like to go back a bit to your earlier education. How far did you go in school?

I finished grade 11.

So you don't have your grade 12?

No, I don't.

Has that ever been a problem for you?

Yes. It's getting so now that the company wants you to have your grade 12 so I'm going for the GED course.

And does your company accept that?

Yes, they do.

If you take the GED, and say, well obviously you are going to go somewhere if you've already had one increment in a year, would this GED be recognized if you wanted to go on to take management course and that type of thing?

Yes, it would.